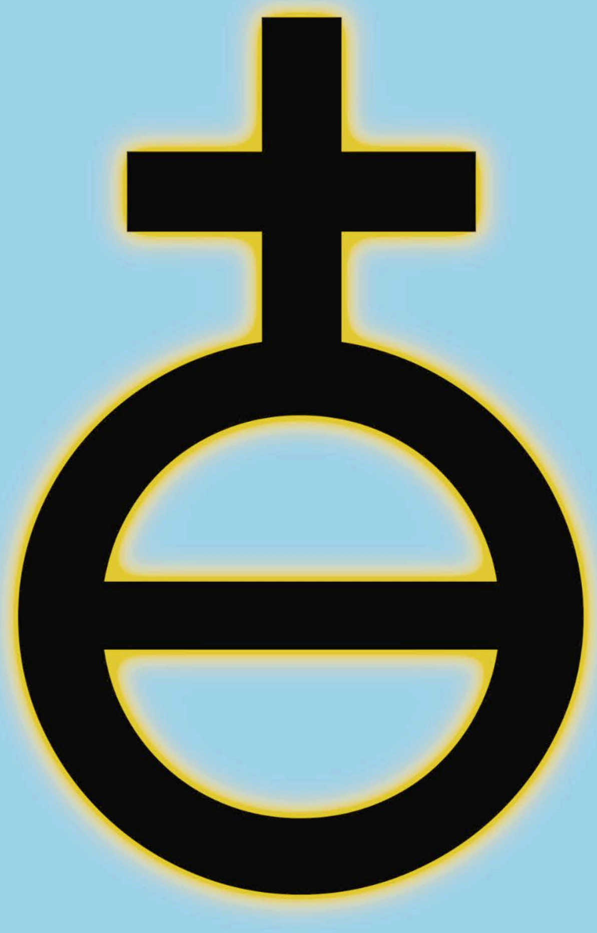
THE PATH OF CINNABAR



JULIUS EVOLA

HERITAGE

THE PATH OF CINNABAR

I feel justified in setting down these pages by the possibility that perhaps one day the work that I have carried out in over forty years will be made the object of attention of a different kind from that which it has typically received in Italy up to this day.

A similar prospect appears rather problematic, given both the present state of affairs, and the social and political climate of the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, my aim is to provide a guide for those who, looking back with interest at the corpus of my works and endeavours, seek some kind of orientation, wishing to determine what, within such a corpus, possesses more than simply a personal and episodic value.

A review of this kind is sure to encounter a number of difficulties. Firstly, there is the matter of approaching books written in different periods, which might appear to be inconsistent with one another, should the temporal framework of their composition be ignored; hence, the need to provide some guidance.

Secondly, and most importantly, what is essential in my work – a work spread over various phases and exploring different domains – must be separated from that which is secondary. This is particularly the case with the books which I wrote in my youth: the reader ought to take account of the necessarily incomplete qualifications I possessed at the time, as well as of the cultural influences to which I was then subjected, and which I only gradually left behind me, at a later date, when I had reached greater maturity.

Besides, one should always bear in mind that, to a large extent, I was forced to pave my own way. I have never benefited from the invaluable help which, at a different time and in a different milieu, was granted to those who, being in touch with a living tradition, wished to accomplish tasks similar to my own. Like a lost soldier, I have sought to join a departed army by my own means, often crossing dangerous, treacherous terrain, and only managed to establish a positive connection at a later date.

What I have felt the need to express and defend, belongs, in its most crucial and effective form, to a different world from that in which I happen to be living. At first, only an innate orientation guided me: the elucidation and definition of certain ideas and aims were only achieved later, thanks to the broadening of my own knowledge and experience.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND EARLY EXPERIENCES

The best way to provide a guide to my works is to begin by describing their genesis, premises and original aims. While it will prove impossible to completely avoid autobiographical references, autobiographical details will be left out as far as possible, and employed mainly to draw light on secondary elements present in my books. From the very start, I believe, it is worth describing what might be termed my 'personal equation'.

Fichte[1] once wrote that each individual, in accordance with who he is, professes a given philosophy. Today, 'social conditioning' – one's individual background and 'positioning' – has acquired a significant place in critical analysis. I feel the need to express my reservations on the matter. To employ biographical criteria of judgment is a legitimate operation only in those cases where the things a person thinks, believes, writes and does possess a purely personal character. While this is indeed the case with almost all contemporary authors, more complex instances also occur, in the case of which a merely 'biographical' method of critical analysis appears both inadequate and superficial. It might also be the case that a given personal 'equation' or disposition is seen to act as the occasional, contingent condition for and means to the expression of ideas which transcend the individual – the individual himself often being unaware of the fact. To use an analogy: it would evidently be easier, for the purpose of bombing a city, to employ an individual possessed with destructive inclinations rather than a person of a humanitarian, philanthropic bent; in this case, the disposition of the former individual will agree with the established aim, while in no way affecting its nature, as ordained from above.

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[1] Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was the foremost philosopher of German Idealism after Kant, and before Hegel. He asserted that self-consciousness was only possible within the context of society as a whole, and that the natural world can only be directly known through intuition. He is also credited with inventing modern German nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars, in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (London: Open Court, 1923). Here, Evola is referring to one of Fichte's chief works, *The Science of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

The same role, in certain cases, is also played by personal equations in the intellectual and spiritual field. As for my character, it is chiefly defined by two dispositions. The first is an impulse towards transcendence, which manifested itself from my early youth. Consequently, I have long felt rather detached from what is merely human. Some have suggested that a similar disposition might derive from a memory predating my birth – and this is also my own feeling. A similar impulse towards transcendence genuinely manifested itself only once I had abandoned my aesthetic and philosophical enquiries. Yet even before then, a certain person who was competent in such matters was surprised at finding in me the kind of inner orientation which usually derives not from theoretical speculation, but from a change of condition achieved through specific operations - of the kind I will frequently come to mention in this book.

One might speak, then, of a pre-existent tendency or a hidden heritage which was subsequently awakened in me by various factors. Hence, the substantial autonomy of my personal development. It might be the case that, at a given moment of my life, I underwent the influence of an imperceptible but concrete action that two given individuals exercised in order to awaken me. Yet the fact that I only came to suspect this years after the event had taken place suggests that a similar operation did not consist in the imposition of something altogether alien to me. A spontaneous detachment from what is merely human, from what is generally regarded as normal, particularly in the sphere of affection, emerged as one of my distinctive traits when I was still in my early youth; or, rather, it emerged *especially* in my early youth. The downside was that, whenever such a detached disposition manifested itself in the sphere of my individuality, it was the cause of a certain insensitivity and cold-heartedness on my part. But in the most important of all fields, this very trait is what allowed me to recognise those unconditioned values which are far removed from the perspective of ordinary men of my time.

The second significant trait of my character might be described, in Hindu terms, as my *kshatriya* bent. In India, the word *kshatriya* was used to describe the human type inclined to action and performance: the 'warrior' type, as opposed to the religious, priestly and contemplative type of the *brāhmana.* That of the *kshatriya* was one of my chief inclinations, but one which I only gradually came to define correctly. Like my tendency towards detachment, my *kshatriya* nature might derive from a second, hidden heritage or obscure memory that I possess. At first, the *kshatriya* trait of my character manifested itself in a rough manner, leading me towards an unbalanced affirmation of the 'I', something which I theoretically expressed through my doctrine of power and autarchy. Yet this trait was also the one existential trait which allowed me to appreciate those anachronistic values of a different world: the world of a hierarchical, aristocratic and feudal civilisation. My *kshatriya* nature provided the foundation for both my immanent critique of Transcendental Idealism, and for my later transcendence of such a philosophy by means of a theory of the Absolute Individual. As my predominant mental disposition, this *kshatriya* trait is also responsible for my tendency to take a clear-cut, uncompromising stand: a kind of intellectual intrepidity which manifests itself polemically, too – in coherence and logical rigour.

No doubt, these two dispositions of mine were somewhat antithetical. My impulse towards transcendence triggered a feeling of non-involvement in me and – at the time of my youth – almost a longing for liberation and evasion tainted with decaying mysticism, whereas my *kshatriya* disposition spurred me to action, driving me towards a free, self-centred self-affirmation. I would argue that the attempt to combine and mutually mitigate these two tendencies represents my most basic existential task. I only managed to fulfil such a task, and to avoid possible collapse, once I had understood the superior essence of both impulses. In the world of ideas, the synthesis between these two tendencies ultimately provided the basis for my definition of 'traditionalism' in my later works, a definition which stands in contrast to the more intellectual and orientalising definition favoured by René Guénon and his followers.

I cannot attribute the above-mentioned inclinations present in me to either environmental influences or hereditary factors (in the conventional, biological sense of the word): I owe very little to the milieu in which I was born, to the education which I received, and to my own blood. I found myself largely opposed to both the dominant tradition of the West – Christianity and Catholicism – and to contemporary civilisation – the 'modern world' of democracy and materialism. I felt removed from both the prevailing mentality of the nation where I was born – Italy – and from my own family milieu. Rather, such elements exercised an indirect, negative influence on me, as they forced me to react.

So much, then, for my 'personal equation'. When I was still a young teenager, studying technical and mathematical subjects, I developed a keen, spontaneous interest in thought and art. As a youngster, once past the stage of reading adventure novels, I made up my mind, along with a friend, to write a condensed history of philosophy. Having already felt an attraction to writers like Wilde[2] and D'Annunzio,[3] I soon became fascinated by all contemporary art and literature. I used to spend days in the library, in that period, following a tight, yet freely chosen reading schedule.

What proved of momentous importance for me was the encounter with thinkers such as Nietzsche, Michelstaedter[4] and Weininger,[5] who contributed to nourish certain tendencies which I already possessed, albeit in a confused, distorted and partly negative way. As for Nietzsche, the consequence of my encounter with him is twofold.

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[2] Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was an Irish novelist and playwright who was and is remembered as one of the most important representatives of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements in English literature.

[3] Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) was an Italian novelist and poet who was one of the best-known figures of his day. At the time that Evola is describing, he was primarily known as an author of the Decadent movement, and as a society figure. It is worth mentioning that he later became famous for his exploits as a pilot in the First World War; for his seizure and subsequent dictatorship of the disputed city of Fiume in 1919 (which was a precursor and inspiration to Italian Fascism); and for his early support for Mussolini and the Fascists, which later turned to rivalry.

[4] Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910) was an Italian Jewish philosopher who died by suicide. He grappled with the issues of persuasion and rhetoric. He understood rhetoric as the social conventions which the weak adopt in their pursuit of pleasure, and persuasion as a state of 'being-in-the-moment' which leads to genuine freedom for the individual. His most important work is available in English as *Persuasion and Rhetoric* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

[5] Otto Weininger (1880-1903) was an Austrian Jewish philosopher who became a Christian, despised Judaism, and, because of his belief that he had failed to overcome the latter within himself, committed suicide. His primary work, *Sex and Character* (Bloomington:

Firstly, what proved important for me was Nietzsche's opposition to Christianity. As someone born in a Catholic family, I had always felt utter indifference for the Christian religion. I felt far removed from the specific themes of Christianity – its theory of original sin and redemption, its doctrine of love, divine sacrifice and grace, its theism and creationism; I continued to feel far removed from Christianity even when my point of view was no longer influenced by Immanent Idealism.[6] If I later came to recognise the valid, 'traditional' aspects of Catholicism, this was merely from an intellectual and objective perspective: the essence of Christianity never struck any deep chord in me. And while I recognised the validity of Catholicism as a positive religion, I also personally witnessed the disgraceful effects of its dissolution into emotional, sentimental and moralistic forms in the context of modern bourgeois society, which is marked by Catholicism's lack of interest in emphasising true holiness and transcendence, symbols, rites and sacraments. I was then forced to pave my way towards a supra-mundane, supra-natural spirituality situated above modern, profane thought (and its abuses), without cultivating any contact with the Catholic tradition; this only took place once I had brought those early experiences to an end in which my innate impulse towards transcendence had been grafted onto the problematic and dubious trunk of Transcendental Idealism.[7]

Indiana University Press, 2005), offers a theory of gender based on the idea that all individuals are composed of both male and female elements, with masculinity described as the genius' striving for absolute understanding, and femininity as obsession with sexuality and motherhood. References to Weininger abound in Evola's own work.

[6] Immanent Idealism is the belief that the divine permeates the entire substance of reality, and that, therefore, one's own thoughts are to be understood as part of the divine essence, and not as something separate from the divine. A worldview that is consistent with Immanent Idealism is commonly found in pagan religions, in which the gods can be known through our experience of the world around us; whereas monotheistic religions usually teach that one's mind, as well as reality itself, is entirely separate from God, and thus God can only be known to us indirectly.

[7] Transcendental Idealism refers to the current of philosophy that began with Immanuel Kant, and which led to the philosophical school known as German Idealism (Hegel being one of its most prominent expositors), and which in turn had an enormous impact on German Romanticism. In essence, it claims that reality can only be known through our imper-

The second way in which Nietzsche agreed with my personal inclinations was in his revolt against the bourgeois world and its petty morals, against egalitarianism, democratic ideals and conformism, and in his affirmation of an aristocratic morality, and of the values of an existence which severs all bonds, and is a law unto itself (needless to say, I also included Stirner[8] among my readings at the time). Of little or no value for me was instead Nietzsche's doctrine of the *Übermensch* in its baser, individualistic, aesthetic and biological aspects, centred as it is on the glorification of 'life' (and this, it should be noted, is what many understood to be Nietzsche's message at the time). What proved more positive for me was, instead, the influence of Michelstaedter, the tragic figure of a young philosopher who was almost unknown. What Michelstaedter's thought emphasised was a purified, extreme theory of 'being', internal self-sufficiency and autarchy. But more on this later (I should just note here that a friend of mine at the time was a younger cousin of Michelstaedter: he used to follow Michelstaedter's ideas, and was later destined to meet a similar fate as him by taking his own life).

From this time onwards, an anti-bourgeois approach shaped every aspect of my private life, including its most concrete ones. To the very end, I have kept myself free from the constraints of the society in which I live, distancing myself from all professional, sentimental and family routines. When I was young, for instance, I made a point not to receive any degree, although I had almost completed my university courses. I couldn't stand the idea of officially being addressed as 'Doctor' or 'Professor', although I was later to be addressed with all sorts of titles which I do not, in fact, possess. Any *kshatriya* would here agree with that member of an ancient Piedmont family who paradoxically claimed: 'I divide the world into two categories: the nobility, and those who have a degree.'

Besides the authors whom I have mentioned so far, I should mention

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fect perception of it, and that, therefore, humans can only have an indirect relationship with the objects of the surrounding world (which Kant termed 'things-in-themselves') through mental abstraction.

[8] Max Stirner (1806-1856) was a German philosopher who denied that there was such a thing as absolute truth, and who favoured the freedom of the individual through a complete liberation from all the abstract (and therefore false) concepts upon which society, in his view, is based. Although he never applied such labels to himself, Stirner is usually seen as an anarchist and nihilist. His primary work is *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

the influence exercised upon me from the eve of the First World War, and throughout the first half of the conflict, by the movement which gravitated around Giovanni Papini[9] and the magazines *Leonardo, Lacerba,* and (later) *The Voice (La Voce).* This was the only true *Sturm und Drang*[10] Italy has ever known, one born from the pressure of those groups and individuals who could no longer stand the stifling air of their petty, bourgeois country in the early Twentieth century. Contrary to what is usually claimed, I believe that this is the only period when Papini was ever truly a relevant and culturally innovative figure. It is thanks to Papini and his group that Italy became acquainted with the most diverse and interesting tendencies of overseas thought and avant-garde art, and underwent a renewal which broadened its horizons. Nor was the influence of Papini limited to the abovementioned magazines, for he was also responsible for several other initiatives, including the publication of the 'Cultura dell'Anima' series, which, at the time, brought particularly noteworthy works, both ancient and modern, to the attention of young people like myself, thus providing the young with some genuine guidance. The same years also witnessed the 'heroic' phase of Futurism,[11] a movement which Papini's Florentine group joined for some time. What excited us the most back then was the paradoxical, polemical, individualist, iconoclastic and revolutionary Papini: the brilliantly shocking façade of Papini's writings notwithstanding, we all believed that the man was driven by a serious intent. In attacking official academic culture, intellectual servility, great names and the moral values of bourgeois society, we all enthusiastically sided with Papini, although that neo-realist, *avant la lettre*[12] style of his unnerved us, as did some of his boorish Florentine manners on the intellectual, polemical plane. We also had faith in the honesty and authenticity of what Papini had written in his autobiographical book, *Un uomo finito*:[13] the nihilism of this work, which spared only the naked individual, he who is scornful of all support and refuses all forms of escapism, of course deeply impressed young people. It was only later that I came to realise that Papini's was only a rootless intellectualism conjoined with a fair dose of exhibitionism. While we should have expected Papini to abandon his positions, his conversion to Catholicism proved just as superficial as his previous attitude, and divorced from any genuine spiritual crisis. All this is clearly evident from *Storia di Cristo*,[14] the work to which Papini owes his fame and success: a book where no transfiguration or existential change is to be found; even the style employed here is the same as that which Papini had always employed, and the book provides no hint of the more profound dimension of Catholicism or of its myths. That book of Papini's is a banal, apologetic book based on the most external, catechistic and sentimental aspects of Christianity; and yet it was the very Papini who had previously introduced young people to the figures of mystics like Meister Eckhart,[15] and to esoteric works which could lead to very different horizons through the genuine, traditionalist transcendence of intellectualistic, anarchic individualism. On the other hand, the fact that Papini's mediocre book was extolled as a masterpiece and valued human testament says a lot about the level of both Catholicism and Italian culture in the present day. But, enough with digressions.

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[9] Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) was an Italian poet and writer who was known as a Modernist literary figure, and who also made a name for himself as a prominent atheist. He caused a great scandal by suggesting that Jesus had been in a homosexual relationship with John the Apostle. After the First World War, Papini actually returned to Catholicism, and became a prominent Fascist intellectual.

[10] 'Storm and stress' is a term originally applied to an 18th-century German movement in drama which insisted upon the primacy of the individual and of emotions over the limits of Enlightenment rationalism.

[11] Futurism was an Italian art movement which was founded by the writer F.T. Marinetti in 1909. Futurism loathed anything conventional or traditional, and embraced speed, technology, youthfulness and violence, as well as Italian nationalism. Although Futurism had already reached its apex by 1918, Marinetti himself became an ardent Fascist, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to convince Mussolini that Futurism should become the official art of Fascism. Marinetti continued to nurse such ambitions, by bringing Futurism closer to mainstream Italian culture, until the late 1930s, when Fascism, following German National Socialism, ultimately condemned all Modernist art as degenerate.

Some of the writers and artists in Papini's group were destined to abandon their original stances and return to more conventional approaches: they then came to regard all they had done in that early, revolutionary period as simply a juvenile experience. In the fields of painting and music, many artists soon 'reverted' to neo-Classical themes. It would not be an empty boast on my part, but rather an objective observation to claim that I am the only person from the *Sturm und Drang* phase of Italian culture to have maintained my original position, and to have sought positive points of reference without coming to any compromise with the world we had all once rejected.

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[12] French: 'before the term existed'

[13] Available in English as *The Failure* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1924).

[14] Available in English as *The Life of Christ* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1923).

[15] Meister Eckhart (1260?-1328) was a prominent German, Christian mystic in the Neoplatonist tradition. His writings are available in many English translations and editions.

In this youthful period of my life, I cultivated personal ties with exponents of Futurism, which was, ultimately, the only avant-garde artistic movement active in Italy at that time. In particular, I became friends with painter Ignazio Balla, and came to know Marinetti. Although my chief interest lay in spiritual issues and worldviews, I also took an interest in painting, for already as a child I had shown a spontaneous disposition towards drawing. Yet, it was not long before I discovered that little in Futurism, aside from its revolutionary spirit, agreed with my own inclinations. What disturbed me in Futurism were its sensualist overtones: its lack of inwardness, its noisy and exhibitionist character, its crude glorification of life and of instinct – something that, curiously, mixed with both its mechanistic nature and its latent Americanism, and with its chauvinist nationalism.

With respect to nationalism, the distance between my own inclinations and those of Futurism became evident at the outbreak of the First World War, when both Futurists and the *Lacerba* group organised an aggressive campaign in support of interventionism. What struck me as inconceivable at the time was the fact that all these people – and Papini being the iconoclast among them – could so easily embrace the most obsolete, jingoist slogans of anti-Germanic rhetoric; that they could really believe that the imminent war would be a war in defence of civilisation and freedom against barbarian invaders. As I had never left Italy, in those days I only had a vague idea of the hierarchical, feudal and traditional structures which survived in central Europe, and which had almost disappeared in the rest of Europe following the spread of the ideals of '89.[16] Yet, I still had a clear idea of where my support lay: rather than merely advocate a pacifist solution and a neutral stand for Italy in the conflict, I wished Italy to intervene on the side of the Central Powers.[17] Clearly, my attitude in this respect had nothing to do with the kind of academic admiration for German *Kultur* – for all that '*Herr Professor*' cultural nonsense – which informed the neutralist stance of many Italian intellectuals: intellectuals of this bent (including Benedetto Croce[18]) never realised that the object of their admiration was something both secondary, and inferior to, the most essential tradition of the German people, which consists of its conception of the State, its values of order and discipline, its Prussian ethics, and its enduring, clear-cut and healthy social divisions (something which had only partly been affected by the bourgeois revolution and capitalism). I remember writing an article at the time, in which I argued that, even given the hypothesis that Italy would want to fight against Germany rather than alongside it, this should be done by embracing German values, rather than the nationalist ideology of irredentism or the democratic, sentimental and hypocritical rhetoric of Allied propaganda. After reading this article, Marinetti addressed me with these exact words: 'Your ideas are farther from mine than those of an Eskimo.' Ever since 1915, my opinion on certain matters remained the same, and was only strengthened later by my personal experience of central Europe.

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[16] 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution.

[17] The Central Powers consisted of Imperial Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire (and, later, Bulgaria). They opposed the Triple Entente, which consisted of the British Empire, the French Third Republic, and the Russian Empire (later to be joined by the United States and other nations). Italy was neutral at first, primarily due to the divided opinions of the Italian public, but ultimately entered the war on the side of the

In other respects, I believed war to be necessary from a strictly revolutionary perspective. Initially, my ideas on the matter had not been different from those of Papini's group: Italy, we all believed, was to awaken and renew itself through combat. Marinetti coined the well-known formula: 'War is the only hygiene of the world.'[19] Yet both Papini and Marinetti ultimately favoured approaches which appeared inconsistent to me.

I joined the war after attending an intensive training course for artillery officer cadets. I was first assigned a place in the combat line near Asiago, up in the mountains, where I continued to pursue my studies as best I could. I did not learn as much as I could have learned from my experience of war and of life in the army, not least because I never engaged in any significant

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Entente on May 23, 1915.

[18] Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) was a highly influential Italian art critic, senator, and a philosopher in the German Idealist tradition. At first, he opposed Italy's entry into the war on the side of the Entente, but voted in favour of intervention out of a sense of national duty once it became clear that the government intended to do so. He initially supported Italian Fascism, but by 1925 he had become an opponent of the regime. Several of his works have been rendered into English.

[19] From Marinetti's 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', which can be found in *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973).

military operations.

In the years which followed the war, when I had returned to Rome, my home town, I lived through a difficult personal crisis. In approaching adulthood, I found the ordinary routine to which I had now returned to be insufferable, and suddenly became aware of the flimsiness and vainness of the ordinary aims of human life. In a confused, yet intense way, my innate tendency towards transcendence was to manifest itself here. I should mention the relevance for me, at the time, of certain inner phenomena which I experienced without any specific technique or any degree of awareness, thanks to the use of certain substances; substances which are not common drugs, and which usually demand a conspicuous degree of control over one's body and its natural reactions. By following such a path, I first encountered forms of consciousness removed from ordinary sense perception. I approached the world of visual hallucinations and, perhaps, even of madness. Yet my healthy constitution, the genuine character of the impulse which had first driven me towards such adventures, and my intrepid spirit led me beyond.

In the light of what I came to experience at a later date, I can affirm that these early experiences of mine did yield some positive results. In particular, these experiences provided me with certain points of reference which I might otherwise have obtained only with difficulty, particularly with regard to doctrinal points, and to the understanding of the more hidden sides of neo-spiritualism, and so-called contemporary occultism. But, more on this later.

One of the consequences of these experiences of mine was the worsening of my personal crisis. Certain traditions, in this case, would use the expression of 'being bitten by the snake'. What I felt was a longing for intensity and absolute values, in the light of which no ordinary object appeared quite adequate. Hence, a *cupio dissolvi* which arises in such cases, an impulse to dissipate and to lose oneself. I reached such a low point that I had planned to bring my very life to an end – I was about twenty-three at the time. I only avoided such an outcome – the very outcome which, in different ways, both Weininger and Michelstaedter had ruinously embraced – thanks to something that I might almost describe as an enlightenment: my discovery of an early Buddhist text (*Majjhimanikāyo* I.1[20]). This text consists of a speech in which the Buddha progressively reveals the forms of attachment which each 'noble son' on the path to Awakening must abandon. Buddha begins with attachment to one's body and feelings, and progresses to attachment to the elements, nature, gods, the All, and so on, climactically, until he reaches absolute transcendence. The last element in Buddha's sequence, which corresponds to the ultimate challenge, is the very idea of 'extinction'. The text says: 'He who takes extinction to be extinction and, having taken extinction to be extinction, thinks of extinction, thinks of extinction, thinks of extinction, thinks "Mine is extinction", and rejoices in extinction, such a person, I say, does not know extinction.' These words struck me as a sudden ray of light. I then felt that my urge to leave and to dissolve myself was merely a bond, a form of 'ignorance' contrary to true freedom. At that moment, I believe, a change took place within me, and I acquired steadfastness capable of overcoming all crises.

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[20] Typically spelled *Majjhima Nikāya* in English, it is one of the Pāli texts of the oldest (Theravāda) school of Buddhism. It is available in English in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

As an individual, however, I still faced the problem of keeping the energy which had been awakened in check – an energy which could not exhaust itself through the channel of ordinary activities. One of the ways in which this energy manifested itself was in my impulse to experience everything to the fullest, to push every experience to the very limit and move beyond. A formula employed by Simmel[21] suggests the only possible solution in such a case as this: that of experiencing life to the maximum, a process which leads to a change in polarity and, hence, to a kind of supra-existence. Yet it was not easy – practically - to apply such a formula, and over the years I have continued to experience this very same problem. What I was told is to endure the often sapping tension, and the consequences of my existential condition. I use the word 'existential' here in the same terms as it is defined by that intellectual current (which I only much later came to know) embodied by Kierkegaard,[22] Jaspers[23] and Heidegger, and which is founded on the idea of existentialism as the paradoxical, actual coexistence of the conditioned and unconditioned. On the basis of the above-mentioned experience, having ruled out the possibility of any violent solution to my problem, I adopted the following approach: on the one hand, I attempted to find a justification for my own existence in tasks and activities which (at least in my eyes) were not of a purely individualistic character; on the other, I questioned so-called destiny whenever possible and, by testing it with regard to my own existence, attempted to subdue its influence in my own life.

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[21] Georg Simmel (1858-1918) was one of the first German sociologists. He also wrote on philosophical topics. Several of his works are available in English.

[22] Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher who is usually considered the earliest exponent of what later came to be termed existentialism. All of his works are available in English. Kierkegaard is particularly notable for his idea of the 'leap of faith', by which he meant that decisions such as belief in God or love are, ultimately, beyond reason.

[23] Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) was a German who originally began his career as a psychiatrist, but whose later interests led him to philosophy. Jaspers, influenced by some traditional writers on mysticism, came to believe that individuals can experience unconditioned

I believe these personal details are enough. I might just add an observation, perhaps, concerning those aforementioned experiences I had by means of external support. Similar tools yield different effects according to individual inclinations, and to the impulse which lies behind their use. So, for instance, while alcohol served to produce ecstatic, sacred experiences in a context such as the Thracian cult of Dionysus,[24] the same substance can also contribute towards spiritual dullness and indifference in regressive human types, such as those, for instance, which are prevalent in contemporary North American society. In this regard, among men of our age, besides the various cases mentioned by William James,[25] it is worth mentioning the case of Aldous Huxley:[26] Huxley's uncommon experiences with mescaline, which he himself regarded as mystical, are clearly related to his own personal qualifications. Moreover, the fact that my use of certain substances was simply an

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reality through Transcendence, although he rejected traditional religious doctrines as a means by which to experience it. Many of his works are available in English.

[24] The practitioners of the Dionysian mystery religion in ancient Greece used wine as a part of their rituals, as recounted by Herodotus. Many traditional religions used alcohol or other drugs as a component of their practice. There have been many books written on this subject, but particularly useful from a traditional perspective are the works of R. Gordon Wasson (especially *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, *The Road to Eleusis*, and *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*) and Peter Furst (*Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens*).

[25] William James (1842-1910) was an American pragmatist philosopher whose most notable works were on psychology and religion. Here, Evola is referring to James' experiments with various mind-altering drugs of his day, nitrous oxide in particular. He recounts these experiences in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

[26] Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was an English novelist who became an enthusiastic advocate of the use of psychedelic drugs, after his own experiences with mescaline and LSD in the 1950s. He described these experiences in detail in his books, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, which did much to pave the way for the psychedelic subculture of the 1960s.

external means of support is suggested by the fact that such experiences exclusively took place in my youth. I never became a slave to such means, and, later, felt no need or desire for their use; what results I may have obtained by these means endured in my life because of their relation to something preexistent and innate within me.

ABSTRACT ART AND DADAISM

I will now turn, briefly, to consider my engagement with abstractionism and Dadaism, although little today remains of such artistic endeavours at a public level.

I already mentioned why I did not get along with Futurists. In the aftermath of the First World War, I was instead drawn to Dadaism, a movement founded by Rumanian artist Tristan Tzara in Zürich. What attracted me to Dadaism was its radicalism: Dadaism was not merely conceived as a new avant-garde artistic tendency; rather, it stood for an outlook on life which expressed a tendency towards total liberation, conjoined with the upsetting of all logic, ethic and aesthetic categories, in the most paradoxical and baffling ways. Having known 'the thrill of awakening', Dadaists proclaimed a 'harsh necessity free from all disciplines or morals', the 'identity between order and disorder, between I and non-I, between affirmation and negation as the radiance of an absolute art', and an 'active kind of simplicity, the incapability of distinguishing any degrees of clarity'. 'What is divine within us' – Tristan Tzara proclaimed – 'is the awakening of an anti-human action.' 'Let each person shout: there is a vast, destructive, negative task to fulfil. To swipe away, and blot out. In a world left in the hands of bandits who are ripping apart and destroying all centuries, an individual's purity is affirmed by a condition of folly, of aggressive and utter folly. With neither aim nor plan nor organisation, let there be unconquerable folly and decomposition.' And again: 'Dada is the virgin microbe.' 'We seek straight, pure, unique energy: we seek nothing at all.' But the most distinctive trait of Dadaism was its downplaying of all similar negations, which it sought to deprive of any pathos by turning itself into forms of stark paradox and pure contradiction. 'Dada is not serious.' – Tzara himself used to say – 'It is not moved by the failings of intelligence. With all its energy, Dada strives for the general spread of idiocy.' 'True Dadaism is against Dadaism: Dadaism changes, and makes positive and contradictory claims at the same time without attributing any importance to this at all.' (One can find similar expressions in T. Tzara's *7 Manifestes Dada,*[1] which were gathered in one volume published in Paris in 1924). Externally, such approaches appeared analogous to the method of absurdity adopted by certain esoteric schools of the Far East (such as Ch'an and Zen) in order to blow away all superstructures of the mind – although the background to these esoteric techniques is very different from that of Dadaism. Another parallel might be found in Rimbaud's technique of poetic clairvoyance, which was founded on the 'planned disarray of all senses'.[2]

As a necessary requirement, Dadaism could not lead to any form of art as it is commonly understood. Dadaism rather signalled the self-dissolution of art into a higher level of freedom. This self-dissolution, at any rate, is what I took to be the essential scope of the movement. By interpreting Dadaism as the ultimate limit of the kind of immanent dialectic employed in various forms of modern art (and described in the appendix to my *Essays on Magical Idealism* [*Saggi sull'idealismo magico*]), and in one of my subsequent philosophical works (*Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* [*Fenomenologia dell'Individuo assoluto*]), I reckoned that I could elevate Dadaism to the rank of a genuine 'category'. The most coherent outcome for Dadaism would have been the rejection of all artistic expression, the adoption of a precarious lifestyle – of the kind adopted by Rimbaud when he rejected his own enlightened poetry after discovering that 'The "I" is another'[3] – or the adoption of a continuous sort of playfulness, characterised by profound seriousness in its levity and by levity in its profound seriousness. But in such an anarchic milieu, the movement chose to take the intermediate step of abstract art. At the time, the artistic formula adopted by Dadaism consisted in the use of pure means of expression, removed from all necessities and from all emphasis on content, in order to evoke or attest to a condition of absolute freedom.

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[1] This volume is available in English as *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries* (London: Calder, 1977). The phrases which Evola quotes from Tzara are from 'Dada Manifesto 1918', which is included in this book.

[2] Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was one of the most important French poets of the Nineteenth Century, classified as one of the Decadents. A prodigy, he began publishing at age 15 and quit writing forever by age 21. The technique to which Evola is referring was described by Rimbaud in a letter to Paul Demeny written on 15 May 1871. It can be found in *I Promise to Be Good: The Letters of Arthur Rimbaud* (New York: Modern Library, 2003).

[3] From the same letter referenced in note #2, above. In the original French: *'Je est un autre'.*

In Italy, thanks to my connections with Dadaism – I personally knew Tristan Tzara and other individuals involved in the movement – I was one of the very first exponents of abstract art. I outlined the theory behind abstract art in a short work entitled *Abstract Art* (*Arte astratta*),[4] which was published in 1920 by the *Edizioni Dada* of Maglioni and Strini, at Rome, and which also contained some of the poems I had written and a few copies of my paintings.[5] In my artworks, passive aesthetic needs were subordinate to the expression of an impulse towards the unconditioned, and were mingled with repercussions of the crisis I previously mentioned (the most acute phase of which coincided with the final stage of my artistic endeavours). In my *brochure*, I denounced the lack of spirituality of what is commonly considered to be spiritual: the values of 'humanity' and of creative spontaneity, as well as romantic and tragic forms of art. The character of abstract art I contrasted with the obscure, continuous desire which traps man in an eternal circle. In my essay, I illustrated the absolute value of the 'I' by using the metaphor of a current which has not yet been checked and channelled; I also talked of a virgin energy yet to be conditioned by man, which manifests itself in the form of feelings, modes of creation, instincts, enthusiasm and utility. A central feature of my artistic work as a whole was the value it attributed to spiritual non-involvement: non-involvement of an impassive and dominating, rather than a merely aesthetic, kind, which would ideally and naturally have taken the form of an arbitrary agitation of forms. In this respect, I viewed the manifest intellectualism of contemporary art as a positive rather than a negative trait, as it affirmed the supremacy of will over spontaneity. By stripping my means of expression of any content, and by employing them in accordance with infinite abstract possibilities, I was aiming to allude to a higher level of being. In my essay, I related such a level to the 'brief, uncommon flash crossing the great death, the great nocturnal element of corruption and death' represented by the experiences of mystics and prophets. No doubt, forms of chaotic escapism were not altogether absent from my personal experiences at this time; yet this did not prejudice the clear delineation, on my part, of a set of specific tendencies: what I criticised in Dadaism was its incapability to reach a more profound dimension (a 'metaphysical' dimension, I should have added). In my eyes, the 'Life' which Dadaism – almost in exasperated, Bergsonian[6] terms – was hoping to free by means of destruction, subversion, incoherence, contradiction and abstraction, was in fact something different: something other than life.

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[4] This is available in English in *Dadas on Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), edited by Lucy R. Lippard, pp. 120-122.

[5] Examples of Evola's early paintings and poetry can be found in various anthologies and books on Dada in English. Also worth exploring is the Web site, *Râaga Blanda* (www.geocities.com/raaga_blanda/index.html).

The movement I had joined out of my high esteem for Tristan Tzara was destined to accomplish few of the things I had sought to find within it. While Dadaism certainly embodied the extreme, unsurpassed limit of all avant-garde artistic currents, it never consumed itself in the fire of a 'leap of boundaries' beyond all art forms and similar forms of expression. Dadaism was soon followed by Surrealism, which, in my opinion, gave proof of a regressive character. For, on the one hand, Surrealism embraced a kind of psychic automatism[7] with its interest in subconscious and unconscious levels of being – to the point of advocating psychoanalysis; but on the other hand, Surrealism (particularly in its 'metaphysical paintings') only expressed confused feelings pertaining to a disturbing, inaccessible *quid*[8] located behind ordinary reality, and devoid of any genuine transcendental opening.

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[6] Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was a French philosopher of Jewish descent who was very influential in the early Twentieth century. In his most famous work, *Creative Evolution*, Bergson postulated that the evolution of species, which he related to creativity, could only occur with the assistance of what he termed *Élan vital*, or the vital impulse. Human intelligence cannot grasp this impulse, according to Bergson, which can only be known through instinct, and thus knowledge that is acquired only with intelligence is always imperfect. In order for humans to achieve creativity or spirituality, they must return to an instinctual method of knowing reality, which, when coupled with intelligence, allows us to attain absolute knowledge. Many of his books are available in English.

[7] Automatism in a Surrealist context refers to certain methods of creativity that they employed, such as automatic writing and drawing. Writers and artists would attempt to create without any prior intent, allowing whatever was in themselves at the moment to be expressed without any conscious thought about its form or content, in theory allowing them to tap directly into the subconscious. Some believed that the words or images which emerged were the product of supernatural beings. Although not a Surrealist, a well-known example of automatism in English is the book, *A Vision*, by William Butler Yeats.

As for abstract art, it was destined to turn into an academic convention. After a break in the aftermath of the Second World War, abstract art was revived and came to flourish as an accessible and often commercialised product. Following this revival, the value of Abstractionism as the mark of a given existential condition, rather than a mere artistic tendency, was completely lost, as was its original impulse towards transcendence, which had always been its chief virtue in my eyes. What is more, petty artists who had already been active within Dadaist ranks, such as Aragon, Soupault, Éluard and Breton, were soon destined to make a name for themselves in the everyday channels of ordinary culture.

With regard to my contributions to the field of art during the period in question, I should mention a personal exhibition of fifty-four paintings of mine which was held in 1920 at the Bragaglia gallery of Rome. This was followed by a one-man show of around sixty works of mine at Herwarth Walden's Der Sturm gallery of Berlin, and by another exhibition which I shared with Ciotti and Cantarelli, again at the Bragaglia gallery in 1921. My paintings were also displayed in group exhibits in various other locations, including Lausanne and Milan. Some of my works captured the attention of Sergei Diaghilev, the famous director of Russian ballets. My sketches for Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisende*[9] were mentioned in various studies of avant-garde Italian stage design. Many of my paintings were entitled 'Inner Landscape', and were marked with an hour of the day. Others consisted of purely linear or chromatic compositions. A small number of my works betrayed the influence of the Futurist emphasis on content, although, when staging my exhibit at Bragaglia's, I spoke of these paintings as 'sensorial Idealism'. In 1921, I stopped painting altogether. I had exhausted the possibilities in this field, and chose to move on. A large number of my paintings are now lost. Only fifty years later, between 1960 and 1963, some people in Italy and France emphasised the precursory historical character of my artistic contribution. I was even to stage a rather successful retrospective exhibit; and one of my paintings is now displayed at the Modern Art gallery of Rome.

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[8] Latin: 'something'.

[9] *Pelléas et Mélisende* was the only opera to be completed by French composer Claude Debussy, in 1901. It was based on a play by Maurice Maeterlinck, and its style defines it as a work of Symbolism. It was quite influential on young artists of the period.

As for poetry, besides what I had included in the appendix of *Abstract Art*, I published a couple of works in some French magazines. What I think is worth mentioning is my French poem *La parole obscure du paysage intérieur*,[10] which featured in the *Collection Dada* series of 1921, and was printed in only ninety-nine copies. The poem was met with appreciation by the chief exponents of Dadaism, but also signalled the end of my involvement in the avant-garde art scene. Four decades later, I agreed for the poem to be republished in the Scheiwiller edition, not least in order to make it clear that I in no way wished to disavow my past involvement in the field – something I do not regard as simply 'wild oats'. Nevertheless, I was keen to emphasise both the particular circumstances and the historical period in which the poem was conceived: without such elucidation on my part, the reappearance of a similar work would only have perplexed those who had come to know me through my more recent and traditionally-inclined work.

To briefly remark on the poem itself, I might say that, while it employed the style of abstract poetry and the so-called 'alchemy of words' (where words are especially made use of by combining their evocative fringes in a manner unrelated to their actual meaning), the work did not entirely lack content. Rather, the poem described a kind of inner drama, the key to which can be found in the Gnostic motto: 'He rose to meet the Great Day, and, by creating darkness, he came to know the light.' The lines of the poem were alternately uttered by four characters representing the tendencies of the spirit. The first character embodied a tendency towards destructive, dissolving overcoming; the second, a female character, embodied the human, emotional and sentimental element (the 'soul'); the third stood for 'disinterested abstraction' of that rarefaction which gradually arises in the 'inner landscape', and is not altogether disjoined from irony; the last character embodied 'descriptive contemplation': he acted almost as a chorus, recording changes in the landscape. The central theme of the poem was that of existential obscurity, of the deaf, continuous gravitation which defines human existence. The twin elements of destruction and rarefaction were present in the poem thanks to its premonition of a higher kind of liberty: the closing word of the text being 'hyperbole' (*'iperbole'*) – the curve by which an asymptote[11] tends to infinity. At the time when it was first published, the poem was recited before the small audience of a Roman cabaret (that of the 'Grotte dell'Augusteo') with a musical accompaniment (Schönberg,[12] etc.).

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[10] *The Obscure Dialogue of the Inner Landscape.* It is available in English at the *Râaga Blanda* Web site mentioned in note #5, p. 21.

Other poems which I had written back then (under the influence of Rimbaud, Mallarmé[13] and Maeterlinck's *Serres Chaudes*[14]), and which I intended to issue in a small volume under the title of *Râaga Blanda,* were never published. At a later date, I planned to pull a dirty trick with a female acquaintance of mine: being friends with Papini, my friend was going to hand him the poems and ask him to write a preface for their publication; Papini would have been informed that the author of the poems was a young artist who had taken his own life. After all, the person who had composed those poems, and who had experienced the underworld of the artistic avant-garde, with all its contingencies and problems, was indeed dead by then: from the late months of 1921, I no longer wrote poetry or produced any paintings.

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[11] An asymptote is a curve near a line which, even if it is extended to infinity, will approach but never touch it.

[12] Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) was an Austrian Jewish composer who developed twelve-tone technique and atonality in music, which was the epitome of the musical avant-garde at the time Evola is describing. Schönberg's music was later banned as degenerate by the Nazis.

[13] Stephenè Mallarmè (1842-1898) was a French poet associated with the *Fin de siècle* period of French art at the turn of the Nineteenth century. His style is considered to be a forerunner of the later, avant-garde art movements of the Twentieth century with which Evola was involved. Much of his work has been translated into English.

[14] Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was a prominent Belgian writer, associated with Symbolism, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911. He also wrote on the mysticism and Spiritualism of his day. The book of his poems to which Evola is referring, first published in 1891, has been translated into English as *Hothouses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

THE SPECULATIVE PERIOD OF MAGICAL IDEALISM AND THE THEORY OF THE ABSOLUTE INDIVIDUAL

My 'artistic phase' was followed by a philosophical one, which extended roughly from 1921 to 1927 (although some of the books written in this period I only published as late as 1930). Just as my interest in art had arisen from a non-artistic background, so did my interest in philosophy develop from non-philosophical concerns.

I already mentioned how, ever since my adolescence, I had developed an interest in philosophy. Such interest, however, had always been conjoined with an interest in what is supra-rational and transcendent. Even as a boy, I had decidedly been drawn to some of Merezhkovsky's novels (*The Death of the Gods*, *The Resurrection of the Gods*)[1] which are permeated by Gnostic doctrines and pagan wisdom. In the immediate aftermath of the War, I directed my attention to spiritual doctrines, particularly those of the East. These I initially approached indirectly, by means of what had been written about them by exponents of the spurious movements known as 'Theosophy'[2] and 'occultism'.

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[1] Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) was a Russian novelist with a strong mystical bent associated with Symbolism and the Silver Age of Russian literature. Many of his books are available in English, including *Death of the Gods* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1901) and *Resurrection of the Gods*, which has been translated as *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci* (London: Constable, 1910). He fled Russia after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and became a virulent anti-Communist, supporting Mussolini and Hitler.

[2] The doctrines of the Theosophical Society, which was founded by H.P. Blavatsky and others in 1875. Their beliefs consist of a syncretic approach to world religions and occult

These contemporary movements wished to promote ancient forms of wisdom as the antidote to both modern materialism and dogmatic, devotional religion. The way in which such knowledge was presented, however, was ambiguous and permeated with prejudices, digressions, supposed revelations and much clairvoyance. Yet it is in the occultist milieu that I also met a number of individuals who were undoubtedly worthy, although they expounded dubious views. Among such people, I should like to mention Decio Calvari, President of the Roman Lega Teosofica Indipendente;[3] Giovanni Colazza,[4] who led an Anthroposophist (i.e., Steinerian)[5] group in Rome; the poet Arturo Onofri,[6] who had undergone a spiritual crisis similar to my own, which had led him to abandon the circles of avant-garde art; the Dutch Orientalist Bernard Jasink; and, lastly, the 'occultist' painter Raul dal Molin Ferenzona.[7]

Given my lack of sufficient experience at the time, my first philosophical works – and particularly my *Essays on Magical Idealism* (*Saggi sull'idealismo magico*) – show traces of the aforementioned ambiguous influences, both of which ought to be taken into account and set apart from what is genuinely important in these early works of mine. On the whole, however, I always preserved my independence, frequently even voicing my lack of regard for modern 'occultism'. Modern occultist currents certainly played a useful, if limited, role in my case, the role they generally play in the contemporary world: that of providing an initial starting point. It is then up to each individual who feels drawn to certain forms of wisdom, as mediated by contemporary 'occultism', to act on the basis of his or her personal qualifications: either to

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traditions, adopting pieces from many different sources. Blavatsky also claimed to receive mystical wisdom from unnamed Tibetan sources whom she termed the 'Hidden Masters'. The Theosophical Society was very prominent in Europe at the time that Evola is describing, and it is regarded as the original source for what later became known as the 'New Age' movement.

[3] Independent Theosophical League.

[4] Giovanni Colazza (1877-1953) was later one of the co-founders of the Ur Group, along with Evola and Arturo Reghini. He was an Anthroposophist.

[5] Anthroposophy is the creation of the Austrian mystic, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who was a prolific writer on spiritual and occult matters, and was a disciple of Goethe. The breadth of his work is vast, but he basically attempted to apply the scientific method to spiritual phenomena. He founded the Anthroposophical Society to further the spread of his ideas.

[6] Arturo Onofri (1885-1928) was an important Italian poet in the first three decades of the century, and an Anthroposophist. Like Evola, he contributed to *La Voce*. None of his writings have been translated.

[7] Raul dal Molin Ferenzona lived from 1879 until 1946.

stop at the usually promiscuous and dispersive surface of 'occultism', or to somehow get in touch with the original sources of traditional wisdom, in the awareness that 'occultist', Anthroposophist and Theosophist speculations mostly serve to discredit rather than valorise traditional doctrines.

As for me, I chose the second option. It is thanks to Decio Calvari, for instance, that I first became acquainted with Tantrism. Not long after, I directly got in touch with Sir John Woodroffe (a.k.a. Arthur Avalon),[8] the chief and most authoritative scholar in the field of Tantrism at the time. Woodroffe's works, and the original Hindu texts which he published, provided me with the basic material I discussed in the book *Man as Potency* (*L'Uomo come potenza*).

Objectively, then, one might say that the first works I wrote in my philosophical phase, including essays and conference papers, represent a contamination of philosophy with the abovementioned doctrines. Yet the opposite was also the case: it is philosophy, in my work, which often contaminated traditional doctrines; for as I later came to recognise, my works attempted to impose an alien and forcefully rationalist approach onto traditional matters. Such an attempt on my part proved useful in the sense that it both provided a solution to some of the speculative problems which contemporary thought faced, and broadened my own existential horizons.

It is in this context that I first conceived the philosophical system which I described as 'Magical Idealism' ('idealismo magico') and 'theory of the Absolute Individual' ('teoria dell'Individuo Assoluto'). The former expression had notably been employed by Novalis.[9] But while Novalis certainly remained one of my favourite authors, and while some of his intuitions had proven crucial to me, my own system was heading in a very different direction.

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[8] Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936) was an English Orientalist who lived in India for many years. He published many books on Hinduism, as well as translations of Hindu texts, including *Principles of Tantra.*

[9] Novalis (1772-1801) was the pen name of the German author, Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, who was considered one of the most important writers of early German Romanticism. He is best known today for his poetry, which has a strongly mystical character, although he was also a philosopher in the Transcendental Idealist tradition. He defined his 'magical idealism', in *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), as the belief that nature itself could be transformed by the power of thought, rather than thought being the product of the world's conditioning, as the Empiricists believed. Many of his works are available in English.

The antecedence, or rather the priority, of non-speculative concerns in my philosophical work might be discerned from the fact that the first book I published after my artistic phase was an introduction to Lao Tzu's *Tao-té-ching.* It is by (often questionably) discussing the thought of this ancient Taoist master that I initially developed some of the central ideas in my system. My book on Lao Tzu, in a sense, represents a link between the non-philosophical and the speculative phases of my career, particularly in the light of the anti-rational and paradoxical sides of Lao Tzu, which undoubtedly bear some affinity with Dadaism. The book was published in 1923 by Carabba under the title *The Book of Life and Virtue (Il Libro della Via e della Virtù)*. As a whole, my edition of Lao Tzu's writing, which owed much to that of A. Ular, was generally a poor one. What is noteworthy in the book is the significance I bestowed on Lao Tzu's text; on the other hand, it would be best to overlook my frivolous attempt 'critically' to increase the value of such a text for 'modern thought', often by means of the clichés of Western Idealist philosophy. What I appreciated the most in the Chinese master was the 'calm and clearness of a thought untainted by sentiment'. In Lao Tzu, I saw a man who had managed to map a metaphysics of transcendence which could act as the model for the superior and self-fulfilled individual by avoiding mysticism and faith in favour of a magical, luminous impassibility. I identified the essence of Lao Tzu's metaphysics in his notion of the Way, the Tao: the process carried out by a 'being' attaining 'non-being'. The world, creation, according to Lao Tzu, represents an eternal flow and an eternal creation which is itself the product of a timeless act. By means of such an act, the primary Principle departs and empties itself, thus attaining a kind of supra-substantiality (symbolized by 'emptiness'), which constitutes the substratum, or ground, of all existence (just as the emptiness of the hub is the centre of gravity for the wheel).

No doubt, I was then tempted to assimilate such an ancient traditional doctrine to modern Absolute Idealism. Yet partly thanks to Lao Tzu, I increasingly – albeit only vaguely at first – felt the need to distance my own system from that of Idealist philosophy. Lao Tzu's notion of 'non-action' was certainly contrary to any philosophically immanent identification of subject and act, or of act and fact – an identification which I came decidedly to oppose, both in itself and in its historicist application. The (ultimately aristocratic) principle of non-involvement and impassibility is what stood at the centre of Lao Tzu's doctrine. By imitating a divine model, the 'Perfect One' – the 'true man' or 'transcendental man' of Taoism – never identifies himself with external reality. By never acting directly, by not externalising his own ego through self-affirmation, and by, instead, actively renouncing to 'be' and to 'act' in a direct and conditioned way, the Perfect One achieves what is truly essential. Thus, he enters the Way and makes himself intangible, inexhaustible, invulnerable and insusceptible to any external attempt to subdue him or render him impotent. By virtue of such a process, the Perfect One also becomes capable of acting in a subtle, invisible and magical way: this is the meaning of the expression *wei-wu-wei* ('to act without acting'), which is also defined as the virtue (*té*) of the Way (*Tao*).

I was to discuss the principles of Taoism, as described by Lao Tzu, in a more faithful and precise manner about thirty-six years later, in 1959, when I was encouraged by a friend to write a second introduction to the *Tao-té-ching*. This new version of my work was published by Ceschina under the title of *The Book of the Primary Principle and of Its Action* (*Libro del Principio e della sua azione*). Besides including a lengthier essay on Taoism, this second edition also provides a different and more academically accurate version of the text. More importantly still, the approach to the text suggested in this edition is free from any observations of a philosophical and Idealist nature, avoiding all references to modern Western thought. Lao Tzu's writing is, rather, placed in the context where it belongs – that of Far Eastern spirituality – and is clarified and interpreted in 'traditionalist' terms, in conformity with the approach I came to favour in the third, post-philosophical phase of my career.

When writing my introduction to the *Tao-té-ching* in 1923, I still lacked a genuine, complete understanding of the spiritual background of the work. No doubt, I had at least managed to avoid the blatant platitudes of those who spoke of the 'passive' and 'quietist' character of Taoism; and essentially, I had captured the higher, metaphysic dimension of the text. Yet my work was not quite devoid of confusion: in more than one place, I described what I perceived as a lack of transcendence in the *Tao-tè-ching* – evidently having in mind here the kind of hypostatic transcendence found in certain kinds of Western philosophy and theology. It is only in my later commentary on the text that I clearly emphasised how Taoism is defined by a kind of 'immanent transcendence': by the direct presence of non-being (in its positive sense of supra-ontological essentiality) within being, of the infinitely remote (the

'Sky') in what is close, and of what is beyond nature within nature. Only then did I clearly point out that Taoism is equally remote from both pantheistic immanence and transcendence, as it is founded on the direct sort of experience which underlies the specific existential structure of primeval humanity.

In this early work of mine, I had already traced the opposition between the ordinary 'I' and the Absolute Individual. Despite my reference to the work of Matjoi,[10] who had already approached these Far Eastern doctrines from an esoteric perspective, my introduction to the *Tao-té-ching* failed to adequately emphasise the essentially 'initiatic' nature of Taoism, and its ideal of a 'real' or 'transcendental' man. This is what I wrote back then: 'Having dispersed the dull clouds of anguish, doubt and passion which afflict our external human character, he (i.e., Lao Tzu) outlines the anatomy and inner logic of the divine in sober terms, revealing it to be the very rationality at the basis of reality. Thus, Lao Tzu renders the anatomy and logic of the divine spiritually true by identifying it with the very nature of man as Absolute Individual and Perfect One. Far from improving on Lao Tzu's claims, subsequent religions and philosophies have only rarely given proof of the stark clarity which marks the mind of the great Chinese. For all that remains in human history besides such clarity are the dispersive and uncertain glimmers of mysticism.' The one-sidedness of this last sentence is self-evident: my reference to the 'glimmers of mysticism' is clearly ambiguous, as it takes no account of the other, different but equally metaphysical traditions on which I later happened to focus. Likewise, my idea of promoting transcendental wisdom as a healing drug for crisis-ridden modern consciences was naïve. 'Most religions' – I wrote in my introduction – 'and moral rules have merely insulted man with their perception of him as something he is not, that is to say: a creature… All this is no longer adequate for modern consciences, which have begun to grow aware of the meaning of absolute reality and of individual solitude. But the price paid for such a discovery has been the loss of all which previously stood for the life and faith of man: his own illusion. Thus, man today appears shipwrecked, clinging as he is to an "I" which he must yet learn to understand without tainting, but which represents his sole certainty. Man stands deprived of religion, faith and enthusiasm, stuck between a science which consumes itself and an exasperated philosophy of formal, shallow conceit; thirsting for freedom, yet inevitably opposed to a nature, society and culture with which he can no longer identify.' It is in the light of such an existential context that I was hoping to point to the relevance of Lao Tzu's doctrines (I spoke in similar terms both at conferences at the time, and in the opening of my *Essays on Magical Idealism*). My book continued: 'Modern man must get to know that "I" which he only mutters about in the deformed version of Stirner's Ego, the social ideologies of Marx and Lenin, the Absolute "I" of Idealism, or the lyric subject of avant-garde aesthetic' (to this list I forgot to add Nietzsche's *Übermensch*).

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[10] Evola is undoubtedly referring to Matgioi, the pen name of Albert Puyon de Pouvourville, a French Orientalist of the early Twentieth century who also had an influence on Guénon. Matgioi wrote many books, but none have been translated into English.

The positive model which I put forth was the path shown by Lao Tzu, which I interpreted as the path of the Absolute Individual. While my emphasis on the crisis of the modern man was not out of place – and I was later to develop the subject in other books – I was clearly mistaken in my attempt to describe an 'initiatic' ideal in historical terms, almost reducing it to a general formula: for the Taoist ideal is essentially non-temporal and unrelated to any specific society or culture. As for the applicability of Taoism, the doctrine is more remote from humanity today than it ever was in the past. At the time, I did not discern all these facts with sufficient clarity. I had yet to free myself from influences deriving from modern culture and ways of thinking. My encounter with Lao Tzu, however, served to awaken certain elective affinities[11] in me: it provided a glimpse of that Olympian superiority which is opposed to Western activism and exuberance.

But I should now like to turn to discuss those philosophical works which I composed in the period which followed.

The need which I began to feel back then to express the worldview and values I was embracing in a more systematic way, and by means of a more technical academic jargon, partly arose from a controversy. My philosophical interests at the time lay in the post-Kantian current of Transcendental Idealism. Unlike most followers of this school, however, I was conscious of the non-philosophical and pre-rational influence which led many to embrace Transcendental Idealism: at the basis of such a philosophical choice, I believed, stood the will to conquer. Another author writing in this period, Grünbaum, had already made similar observations as mine in his essay entitled *Love and Dominance as Basic Themes in Philosophical Views Throughout the World*[12] (later, what became popular was the existentialist, or even psychoanalytic interpretation of philosophical systems – the former approach having already been adopted by Nietzsche). Nevertheless, professional Idealists were not aware of the pre-rational foundation of their philosophy, and believed they were adopting a pure, 'objective' method of analysis. I personally interpreted my preference for Idealism as the manifestation of one of the chief components in that 'personal equation' of mine which I previously mentioned. At the same time, however, I also maintained that Transcendental Idealism represented the final stage reached by human reason with regard to the issues of certainty and knowledge (that is to say: with regard to the problem of epistemology). Almost as if this were my mission, I felt the urge to ponder on the conclusions which had been reached on the subject and to move beyond, in order to reach the very end in rigorous conformity with the original impulse which had given birth to such philosophy. I was soon to discover that such an endeavour inevitably led to the immanent self-transcendence of philosophy as a whole; and that the philosophical works I had written were essentially a preparation for my future exploration of a field which was no longer that of discursive thought and speculation, but the field of inner, self-fulfilling action: the very field aimed at transcending human limits which I had encountered in some of the works I had read at that time. The words of J. Lagneau,[13] that I chose to quote at the opening of my *Essays*, are revealing: 'Philosophy is the kind of reflection which ultimately recognises its own insufficiency, and the need for an absolute action arising from within.'

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[11] 'Elective affinities' is an expression one is not likely to encounter often in English today. Originally, it was a scientific term, referring to the fact that chemicals display a preference to combine with certain other chemicals, and not with others. Goethe later adopted this term to refer to the same phenomenon in human relationships, explaining why individuals prefer to relate with certain people rather than others. Goethe's third novel, which uses the term as its title, explores this phenomenon, and this is also the way in which Evola uses it.

To such an extent did I feel the need to take this extra step, were it even in an impersonal way, that when I was faced with some difficulties in my attempt to publish my main philosophical work, *The Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* (*Teoria e fenomenologia dell'individuo assoluto*), on account of both the length and content of the text, I suggested to a friend of mine that he might publish it at his own expense and under his own name. This book had proven a real challenge for me because of the vast technical expertise it required; I was keen to publish it, because I wished to fix what I believed to be the limits of modern thought. I was not really concerned by what name would appear on the front cover of the book – although my publishing proposal failed to yield any result, because the person I had spoken to intended to carry out a number of changes and alterations to the text that I simply could not accept.

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[12] Abraham Anton Grünbaum, *Herrschen und lieben als Grundmotive der philosophischen Weltanschauungen* (Bonn: Cohen, 1925). No English translation exists.

[13] Jules Lagneau (1851-1894), a French philosopher. No English translation of any of his works exists.

As for the controversy I alluded to, this was due to the fact that Italy, at the time, was dominated by the neo-Hegelianism of Croce, and, later, of Gentile.[14] Having met some of the exponents of such schools, I became annoyed at their extraordinary presumptuousness: although mere intellectuals, these philosophers posed like the high-priests of critical thought and apostles of the Word of the Absolute Spirit; with arrogance, they pressed charges of dilettantism against thinkers dear to me at the time who had refused to systematise their profound visions and intuitions in conformity to the rules set – to quote Schopenhauer[15] – by the 'philosophy of the professors of philosophy professors'. Theirs, in all respects, was nothing but a world of puffed-up rhetoric. Besides, what I found disgusting in all this was the coexistence of the petit-bourgeois, paid, married and conformist university professor alongside the theory of an absolute, free 'I' which is the creator of both the world and of history. Needless to say, such people perceived the doctrines of wisdom which I had then begun to explore as mere 'superstitions', as outdated residues of the progressive unfolding of 'critical consciousness'; and in a sense, of course, this was only to be expected: for secular 'Enlightenment' was, after all, the true intellectual background of these people.

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[14] Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) was an Italian philosopher who developed what he termed 'Actual Idealism', in that he believed that Idealist philosophy was only relevant in terms of how it could be applied to life itself, as opposed to mere speculation. He was a staunch Fascist from 1922 until his murder at the hands of anti-Fascist partisans in the Saló Republic, was a member of the Fascist Grand Council, and considered himself to be the philosopher of Italian Fascism. Many of his works are available in English.

[15] Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was a German philosopher who is widely regarded as the supreme philosophical pessimist, although he regarded himself as a Buddhist (based upon the limited knowledge of Buddhism available in Europe at the time), perceiving similarities between his own view of suffering as being caused by desire, and the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. All of Schopenhauer's major works are available in English.

I made up my mind, then, to settle the score. To do so, I began to systematically study the original, classical texts of Idealism, from Kant to Hegel, to the late Schelling[16] (and this is also how I came to learn German, as many of these works had not yet been translated at the time). Having completed such studies, I became aware of the incomparable poorness and vacuity which characterised the Italian epigones of Idealism, who had rendered the original purpose of this philosophy absurd, thanks to the use of a foolish and spurious dialectic composed of only a few inadequate categories. On top of this, Gentile also displayed a conceited haughtiness and an unbearably paternalistic pedantry. Whether sound or not, how different the works of these people were from the classic works of Idealism – the philosophy of nature and mythology of Schelling, the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*[17] and *Encyclopaedia*[18] of Hegel, Fichte's theories on science –especially from the point of view of ingeniousness, inventiveness, creative impetuosity and of the effort to embrace the multiple variety of reality and experience with clarity. In one of his letters, Croce at least deigned to describe one of my later philosophical books as 'well arranged and coherently thought-out'. While I personally found a greater courtliness and clarity of thought in Croce – whom I personally met – than in Gentile, I still could not avoid noticing the deficiency inherent in his purely discursive thought, which was ultimately destined to leave the field of grand, speculative problems for the dissipative activities of essay writing, literary criticism and secular, liberal historiography.

Nevertheless, thanks to the philosophical studies I had undertaken, I was now capable of competing with such people in their own field. I had learned their jargon, the use of which they considered proof of reliability and of an up-to-date, 'scientific' thought.

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[16] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) was a German philosopher who was considered the leader of German Romanticism in his day. His primary contribution was *Naturphilosophie* ('philosophy of nature'), which he defined as the need to recognise nature itself as an ideal, with concrete reality, and not simply as an unknowable abstraction and an obstacle to the intellect. Schelling further believed that reason was not sufficient to reconcile the two worlds of thought and nature, which could only be accomplished through creativity or mystical intuition. Many of his writings are available in English.

[17] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Many other English versions exist as well.

[18] Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

As for the content of what I was writing, my intellectual horizon was not strictly limited to Idealism. Besides – as previously mentioned – what was inspired by non-discursive forms of knowledge, what contributed the most towards my own speculative thought was Nietzsche and Michelstaedter. I was also influenced by the notion of true freedom developed by the French 'Personalists': Lachelier, Sécretan, Boutroux, Lagneau, Renouvier, Hamelin and Blondel.[19] These thinkers were either ignored, or taken only into marginal account by Italian Idealists, whose culture was generally confined and limited, in its provincialism, to the antecedents of Hegelianism (which were themselves often unknown in their original form).

My *Essays on Magical Idealism* was published by Atanòr in 1925. These essays anticipate some of the themes which I touched upon in *The Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual*; they anticipate certain themes, that is to say, from the point of view of the reader: for the book was already close to completion in 1925, although I still did not know when I would have been able to publish it. Hence, I don't think it is worth my discussing the book separately here. I might only mention, aside from its critical and constructive core, two of the book's chief aspects. The first aspect concerns the frequent references in the book to initiatic and esoteric doctrines, which could not but appear unfamiliar and unusual to the ordinary reader – particularly if the reader happened to be a lover of modern philosophy. Such references only partly anticipated what I was more openly and adequately to discuss in later works from my post-philosophical phase, when I got rid of all the residues from ambiguous, secondary sources. In my earlier, philosophical works, I attempted to systematise and present the inner logic of the experiences, practices and achievements of yoga, magic and initiation. This, in particular, was the purpose of a lengthy chapter in my book entitled 'The Essence of Magical Development' ('L'essenza dello sviluppo magico') – something which I further developed in the final section of *The Phenomenology of the Absolute*

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[19] It is important to point out that the Personalism to which Evola is referring is the original, or Theistic Personalism, and not the later form of French Personalism which originated in the 1930s. Theistic Personalism postulates that everything that exists must be understood as a manifestation of God, or the divine personality, and that, therefore, all individuals are an expression of a single, divine will. Of the authors named by Evola, there is an English version of Jules Lachelier, *The Philosophy of Jules Lachelier* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), and several works each by Émile Boutroux and Maurice Blondel.

Individual. Other essays which I published separately at the time – such as *Purity as Metaphysical Value* (*La purità come valore metafisico*), which was published by Bilychnis – served the same rationalising and systematising purpose. On the whole, these essays constituted an unprecedented attempt: for no one – aside from Marcus,[20] von Baader,[21] Hamann[22] and Schopenhauer in some of his works – had ever thought of engaging with such disorderly, and in many ways discredited, subjects through the lens of systematic, dialectic and speculative thought.

Moreover, in the last chapter of the book, which is entitled 'The Modern Need for Magical Idealism' ('Esigenze moderne verso l'idealismo magico'), I explored the work of certain noteworthy modern thinkers, seeking to 'understand the basic drive behind their ideas' and 'to show how, were such a drive to be given free course, the outcome of the various systems conceived by these thinkers would be Magical Idealism' (which I had outlined in the other essays of my book). The thinkers I focused on were C. Michelstaedter and O. Braun[23] – the faint traces of whose personal experience survive in the diary he had written as a teenager before falling on the battlefield of the First World War – G. Gentile, H. Hamelin[24] and H. Keyserling.[25] Mine was an immanent critique, which served both to prove my need to embrace certain ideas, and to allow me to isolate and gather those philosophical elements which I found useful for my purposes. Of course, not all the thinkers taken into account – and others might have been added – dealt with critical Idealism. I believe H. Keyserling did not deserve the attention I gave him: after meeting the man in person, I came to realise that he was nothing but a 'lounge-chair philosopher': vain, narcissistic and exceedingly arrogant. What I had found most appealing in Keyserling's books was the notion of 'creative knowledge', which implied a shift of consciousness capable of activating the function of 'meaning': meaning that invests facts and things, brings them to life, and makes use of them as a means to free expression in a context which is no longer merely subjective – as in the case of lyricism or art – because it touches the very ground of reality, removing both necessity and opacity. At Darmstadt, partially by referring to certain Eastern doctrines, Keyserling had established a 'School of Wisdom', which soon disappeared, leaving little trace. As it were, the founder of this school was far from possessing the dignity of a true Master. Keyserling (who was Baltic, after all) limited himself to expressing the kind of occasional intuitions which are common among Slavs, but devoid of any firm foundation.

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[20] I am uncertain about this reference, but Evola is probably referring to Adalbert Marcus (1753-1816), a German physician who associated with the German Idealists, and who attempted to formulate a theory of medicine consistent with Kant's ideas. None of his works are available in English.

[21] Franz Xaver von Baader (1765-1841) was a German philosopher and theologian who believed that reason alone was insufficient to understand reality, and that the process of knowing itself brings us into direct contact with the divine. His works are unavailable in English.

[22] Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) was one of the most important philosophers of the German Counter-Enlightenment, and the *Sturm und Drang* movement, who served as an inspiration to many of the Idealists (although he disagreed with Kant). His writings are critical of reason and the ideals of the Enlightenment. There are many editions of his work in English.

[23] Otto Braun (1897-1918) was a German soldier who was killed in the First World War at Marcelcave. His writings, which say little about the war, were published in English as *The Diary of Otto Braun, with Selections from His Letters and Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924).

[24] Octave Hamelin (1856-1907) was a French philosopher who is classified by Evola as a Personalist. See note #19, p.36.

[25] Count Hermann Graf von Keyserling (1880-1946) was a German philosopher from Estonia who wrote about his extensive world travels. He rejected organised religion, and

Let us now return to my own philosophical system. In its (perhaps arrogant) claim to represent the ultimate limit of modern 'critical' thought – I was later more adequately to use the expression 'of constituting the thought of the modern crisis' – my philosophical system was based on the immanent critique of Transcendental Idealism. I accepted Hegel's dictum that 'every philosophy is a form of Idealism: even when it presents itself as a form of non-Idealism, it is only an Idealism unaware of itself'. At the same time, in my work I emphasised the hidden meaning of Idealism, and its irrational foundation, which consisted (as I previously mentioned) in a will to be and to conquer; hence, according to my own understanding of the term, in a basically 'magical' impulse. As proof of this tendency within Idealism, I emphasised the fact that 'the need for absolute certainty in what is immanent' had always stood at the core of all the developments of transcendental criti-

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in 1920, he founded his 'School of Wisdom' at Darmstadt, Germany, which taught that wisdom could be gained from a syncretic approach to religion and philosophy. He also preached pacifism and democracy, and opposed the National Socialists. He was very influential in his day. Many of his books have been translated into English.

al philosophy. I wrote: 'In the denial of the existence of the "other" – both the product of a logical enquiry into the possibilities of knowledge, and a necessary condition in a system which is based on absolute certainty – one finds the manifestation of a deep-seated drive towards self-affirmation and domination; the manifestation of which is reflected in the world of ideas.' Mine, then, was almost an existential analysis of Idealism – or rather, of the very root of its epistemological problem. The work ends with the words: 'It is men like Nietzsche, Weininger and Michelstaedter who give meaning to the words of thinkers like Descartes, Berkeley, Kant and Fichte.'

And yet, the drive to conquer had undergone a pause, or rather a reversal, in Idealism. In my book, I could have described this as a process of dissociation or 'self-alienation' in which the ideal embraced by all these philosophers is projected and 'realised' – as a psychologist might say with regard to hallucinations – on an abstract, speculative plane. Once transposed onto such a plane, the philosophical ideal is disjoined from the reality of the individual, from the living whole of the person, which becomes increasingly excluded and degraded. In my work, I argued that if Idealism had occasionally thought it was progressing towards a solution of its speculative problem – i.e., of the immanence and elimination of all transcendence – this is only because it was, in fact, progressing towards alienation.

It would be superfluous to present my philosophical arguments in detail. I will limit myself here to a brief overview. In a sense, the philosophy of Idealism can be summed up by Berkeley's formula *esse est percipi* – that is to say: the only being which a person can concretely and reasonably talk about is the one which meets his own perception, thought or fantasy. As for all other beings, in no way can they be known: it is as if they did not exist. Berkeley's formula has been broadened – and I myself contributed to the process – by applying it not merely to our perception, but to any basic act of conscience, which represents the background common to all faculties. Absolute Idealists have defined such an 'act' as an act of 'placing'. While Schopenhauer, following Kant, had suggested that 'the world is one's own representation', Absolute Idealists - following Fichte - argued that 'the world is one's own position'; their followers even talked of the world as being one's 'creation'.

A little sagacity would have sufficed to draw philosophical conclusions with regard to what it is that the 'I' knows only indirectly (i.e., by way of other subjects, of social life, culture, history, etc.). Yet, the most basic and ultimately most banal problem remained: the fact that by stripping everything of the content of conscience, thought, experience or whatever one wishes to call that which functions 'for oneself', all will ultimately turn into nothing. And with this, the circle is completed. In one area alone did Idealist philosophers not get to the bottom of the problem, and this for reasons which were more moral or 'human' than theoretical; and this area is the negation of the self-existence of other subjects, of other 'Is.' Various speculative means had been employed by Idealists in order to avoid this scandalous problem, and the dreadful perspective of the Ego's cosmic solitude in a world of *Māyā,*[26] embracing not only nature, objects and skies, but even human beings. Nevertheless, this did not prevent me from proving the inevitable need of advocating so-called 'solipsism' (a rather inadequate term in this case) when one wishes to follow Idealist epistemology. After all, speculative arguments aside, do dreams not present us with other living creatures who appear real, act in unlikely ways, and can even terrorise us, while being mere projections of our own fantasy? Worse still is the case of the real world, if one emphasises the coherent and logical traits which (unlike the world of dreams) it displays. For our own experience of the real world, unlike that of the disorderly reality of dreams, presupposes the conditioning use of categories of reason which – as Kant already knew – only exist in ourselves as the transcendent subject: for without us, all would remain in the incoherent state of madness or dream. Again, even on a purely epistemological level – that is to say: on the plane of critique and knowledge – the circle was completed.

The world, then, can only be 'my' world. Were there to exist anything apart from oneself, something 'objective', one would still know nothing about it: for in the same way that objects touched by King Midas would turn to gold, the very moment such objective things were to be known, they would turn into one's own thoughts, experiences and representations. In other words, in one way or the other, even such objective things would submit to one's own conditionality. In this regard, I felt that all doubts were dispelled; I felt that the door of mystery had thus been shut, and that the 'I' had been provided with a solid and inaccessible fortress in which to feel safe, free, and sovereign.

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[26] *Māyā* is a Sanskrit term for the world of the senses, which obscures genuine reality (or the reality of the gods).

And yet, it would not have been difficult to discover the inconsistencies of this system by means of a rigorous (and honest) analysis. For it is one thing to argue that 'the world is one's own representation' (i.e., one's own experience and 'thought'); quite another to claim that 'the world is one's own position' or 'reaction'. And again: the 'I' of Idealism is one thing; another is the 'I' which each one of us concretely experiences, not theoretically or philosophically, but practically. Once the world – not merely the world of ideas and feeling, but the world of things and beings located in time and space – has been defined as real and certain only insofar as it is a form and system of thought, the question remains as to what situation the 'I' ultimately finds itself in a world which has both been 'rendered immanent' and 'placed' into existence. Were the 'I' merely to possess an abstract faculty of thought, the problem might still be solved through a definition of the 'I' as a kind of impersonal, transcendental machine which displays all that an individual knows and experiences – roughly the same process as that which takes place in dreams, where an individual is rarely aware of being not only the spectator, but also the creator of what the unconscious will of his fantasy makes him experience. It would be impossible, however, simply to limit the 'I' to such a process – even in the case of the most stupid and stupefied human being. Faced with such difficulties, the Idealist philosopher, like an Atlas shrugging the cosmic weight off his back, had gotten rid of the true 'I', and had embraced a 'transcendental "I"' or 'Absolute Spirit' (also known as *Logos*,[27] Idea or Pure Act) which he bestowed with a cosmogonic function. The Idealist philosopher declared that, in comparison to such a transcendental 'I', the concrete personality of an individual is merely illusion or fiction – Gentile even used the expression 'a puppet of the imagination'. According to this Idealist view, one partakes of truth, certainty, reality, ethics, spirituality and history only insofar as one identifies oneself with such a transcendental entity.

This philosophical approach was the object of my critique. The 'I' – I argued – cannot be defined as mere 'thought', 'representation' or 'epistemological subject'; rather, the 'I' is truth, action and will. All it took to shake the foundations of abstract Idealism was to place these values at the centre: for the need to relate the 'transcendental "I"' of the Idealists – which was merely another name for God the creator in the sky (although Idealists themselves rejected such an idea as a superstitious and uncritical hypothesis) – to our own real being caused a paradoxical and regressive philosophical collapse.

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[27] *Logos* was the Classical Greek term for the principle which orders the cosmos.

First of all, an individual can only claim to possess 'transcendental' thought (the kind of thought corresponding to the world of objective 'appearance') – in such a way as to consider the world as something 'placed' there by himself – if he conceptualises such a possession as an unconscious act on his part. Already, E. von Hartmann[28] had emphasised this problem in his well-founded realist critique (which Idealists predictably ignored). Besides being an unconscious act, the act in question must also be non-intentional, non-predictable and contingent: no Idealist, for instance, could ever predict what his own thought will 'place' with regard to the man he will be meeting in the street, or the words his friend will be uttering. Moreover, such an act must also be a passive act; and this is where I attacked both the famous Hegelian claim concerning the identity of what is real and what is rational ('all that is real is rational and all that is rational is real'), and the similar post-Hegelian claim concerning the identity of what is true with what is desired, and of fact with act (which implied the so-called theory of 'concrete will'). Such claims begged the question of whether what is real is defined as real because it is rational or whether, on the contrary, what is rational is defined as rational because it is real; and, further, of whether what takes place is defined as real because it has been wished (thus proving to be real only insofar as it has truly been wished, and false when corresponding to a lack of will) or whether, on the contrary, it is said to have been wished because it is true (i.e., on the simple and irrational ground that it exists and is taking place).

Clearly, given the central importance of 'placing' or 'creating' for the transcendental 'I', only the latter can be the case: for absolute Idealists, it is reality which determines what they define as rational and desired. Ultimately, this approach implies a basic passivity on the part of the true 'I', which is told what he is 'freely' to desire in things, history, contingencies, etc. In order to drive such an approach to its inevitably absurd conclusion, I made use of a drastic argument: I argued that an Idealist who is being tortured should judge the situation he finds himself in as 'natural' and 'desired by himself'

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[28] Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) was a German philosopher who was best known for his book, *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1884).

(i.e., by his 'true' 'I'), since such a situation is 'real'; and conversely, he should judge his own revolt against such a situation and his own suffering as mere whims and irrational caprices on the part of the empirical subject: a mere 'puppet of the imagination'. Similar scenarios might be imagined in the case of most experiences, whether theoretical or practical. (In a chapter of one of the books I published much later, *Men Among the Ruins* [*Gli uomini e le rovine*], I denounced the immorality of this sort of Idealist approach in its historical and political applications).

What stood at the basis of my philosophical analysis was the distinction between truly free acts and 'passive' acts, for which I also used the expression 'spontaneity'. Truly free acts are characterised by an interval between what is possible and what is real, where the former also exceeds the latter – in the sense that the power to act always precedes and rules the act itself, for it determines its very existence and essence. This interval between what is possible and what is real is instead lacking in passive or spontaneous acts, which are defined by a direct and necessary shift towards action (or perception, representation, etc.); as in an automatic process, what is possible here disappears without leaving any trace in the real world – in what happens, what is seen, heard, etc. Hence, in the case of 'spontaneity' one can only talk of something which is 'mine' without being 'me', since – as in the case of emotions or passions – one cannot claim personally to have implemented any direct change: one's relation to spontaneity is not an unconditioned causality and possession. This, then, is the central issue I raised: it is one thing not to be determined by something else (i.e., externally), quite another to be truly, positively free. A chapter of *The Theory of the Absolute Individual* is devoted to a critique of all false notions of freedom such as, I believe, was never implemented in such radical terms.

My ultimate philosophical conclusions, then, were as follows: the Idealist reduction of nature, and most of the world of real experience, to a mere position of the 'I' is accomplished 'through the reduction of the "I" to nature, for nothing is known – or rather, nothing is assumed to be known – of that very "I" which is freedom; and further, through an identification of the notion of the "I", by the use of an evident paralogism, with that of the principle of spontaneity, which is ultimately the principle of nature.' Given that the cosmogonic, transcendental activity of the 'I', when compared to that of the concrete 'I', must either be defined as an unconscious act, or be seen to possess the qualities of a passive, unintentional, unpredictable, aimless, and merely 'spontaneous' activity, it is clear that, were Idealists seriously (and not merely imaginatively) to follow the principle of the concrete person's conformity to the transcendental 'I' (known as the 'pure act', or by what other name Idealists chose to describe their new god), they would have utterly regressed to a sub-personal level; even more so than the various philosophers who sung of 'Life' and irrationality, and who were haughtily shunned by Idealists. In the various stages of transcendental philosophy – from Kant to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Weber[29] and Gentile – I identified a progressive flight away from the genuine 'I'. 'The "I"' – I wrote – 'does not become the form which epistemologically rules the contingency of phenomena (what Schlegel[30] terms "the chaos outside the system") – for, like the conscience described by Gentile, that is to say: in the absolute adherence to a spontaneous (i.e., representative) act, according to which all things take place and affirm themselves in the conscience of the "I", by a passive kind of mysticism identical to an absolute and stupefied phenomenalism... (etc.) The individual does not endure: it gives way; it does not rule things, but melts within them. This is the path of decadence.'

This is where the critical part of my philosophical system ended and the constructive part began. What to do, I asked myself, once the true nature of things had been disclosed in fair and bold terms? At this point, the solution for those who did not limit their use of Idealism to an academic context would have been either to dismiss the whole philosophy as a kind of madness, or to find some subtle way of relating Idealism to religious forms of transcendence. Idealists could choose one of these two options, or else tread the dangerous path which I had warned about.

I can only provide a general outline of my own philosophy. The positive, constructive part of my philosophical system was based on the following premise: the positing of the experience of a pure 'I', a detached 'I' which was a centre unto itself: a pure being and an absolute form of self-evidence, anterior to any content determined by consciousness and thought. On such a basis, I argued against Descartes that it is not the case that 'I think, therefore I am', but rather that 'I am, therefore I think': for thought, according to my view, was merely a faculty or a possibility of the 'I'. This experience of the pure 'I' is something that I posited as a contingent thing, which might or might not be present, being non-inferable and an absolute principle unto itself. Similarly, Weininger had spoken of the 'occurrence of the "I"'; Rimbaud of the '"I" which is another'; Hindu metaphysics of the Self, or *ātma,* which is like pure light; and Classical Antiquity of the *nous*.[31] Later, Husserl's[32] phenomenology – which I knew nothing about at the time – followed a similar path (if only in a very limited way), by talking of the phenomenological reduction or destruction which, as basic evidence, reveals such an 'I' as the 'pure and immovable centre of light'. What is most significant here is the fact that all such definitions were not the product of theoretical speculation, but of pure experience (albeit not of an ordinary kind).

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[29] Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German who is considered one of the founders of sociology. He is best known for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), which argues that the unique characteristics of Western culture, and Protestant ethics in particular, led to the distinctive features of Western society in modern times, in particular the development of capitalism and democracy.

[30] Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829) was a German poet and philosopher who is credited with being the intellectual founder of German Romanticism. Many editions of his works are available in English.

I then proceeded to define the concept of value by vesting the term with a unique meaning. Value, according to my own definition, was the only kind of relation which the 'I' could have 'in accordance to justice' with its 'determinations' – a word I used to describe all contents of experience. Such a relation necessarily possessed three features: firstly, the manifestation, in the case of the determinations of the 'I', of a meaning (i.e., of a concrete, and not merely abstract or intellectual meaning); secondly, a unitary and direct relation in the determination (i.e., a relation of a possessive or dominant kind); and finally, the possession of the same traits as those deriving from a stark and free will.

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[31] *Nous* is a Greek term which refers to the mind or the intellect. Evola is likely referring to the usage of this term by the Neoplatonists, who understood *nous* as the process by which the mind transmutes matter into form, form which was identified with beauty. They also believed that objects could be thus transformed by both reason and the soul (although reason was considered the more perfect method).

[32] Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was a widely influential Austrian Jewish philosopher, and one of the teachers of Martin Heidegger. He founded the phenomenological school of philosophy in 1900, primarily through his book, *Logical Investigations* (London: Routledge, 1970), and elaborated further on his theories in 1913 in *Ideas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931). Perhaps the most important aspect of phenomenology is the concept of intentionality, by which it is asserted that consciousness only comes into being in terms of its relationship to objects (either physical objects or abstract ones, such as desires). Phenomenology led to the development of existentialism (although Husserl himself regarded existentialism as a misunderstanding of his ideas).

In embracing this notion of the 'I' and this principle, or imperative, of 'value' as the very condition for the 'rationality' of existence (in a higher sense), one faces difficulties similar to those which face abstract Idealism. For if the reality of the 'I' appears both self-evident and absolute (once it has directly been experienced), it is also evident that within 'the empirical state of being' (as I termed it), a subject matter and experience is found, the relation of which to the 'I' is of a different kind from that which defines 'value'.

At the time I was writing all this, I knew nothing of existentialism. It was only many years later that existentialist philosophy, along with Husserl's phenomenology, became fashionable, in accordance with the changes our civilisation had undergone. Yet in my own work, I ultimately echoed the basic theme of existentialism: the paradoxical and irrational coexistence and the mutual involvement, in real existence, of the finite with the infinite, and of the conditioned with the unconditioned. Besides, I have already mentioned the personal crisis which I had undergone years earlier because of my awareness of this very fact.

Existentialism was merely to acknowledge such a paradox and irrationality, wallowing in the feeling of crisis or seeking some kind of evasion by means of inner acquiescence (I made similar observations in one of my latest books, *Ride the Tiger* [*Cavalcare la tigre*], which includes a critical overview of existentialism). By contrast, I took this very existential condition as the starting point of my theory of the Absolute Individual.

Again, what was at stake here was the idea of absolute freedom. In the course of my critique of Idealism, I had noted how, in one way or another, such philosophy is always destined to return to its original dogmatic formulation. For instance, Idealism spoke of a 'dialectic of the concrete *logos*', in virtue of which the spirit was first to dissolve its pure identity and extinguish itself through an act of 'self-placing' (an act identical to that of placing the determined object, or the non-'I'), and then to recognise itself by virtue of that very act – an idea which implies the notion of change. What is the reason behind such a process? Any answer implying that the spirit would otherwise be nature, rather than genuine spirit, can easily be dismissed on the grounds that the spirit might very well *be* nature, if it chose. Already, Fichte had established the idea that 'freedom *must* be' as an obvious postulate. Other philosophers, such as Hamelin, had identified the entire unfolding of categories by which they sought Idealistically to explain and justify the given world (or, at least, the basic features of such a world) as the process whereby the spirit 'determines its own freedom'. But again, the question arose as to whether the spirit achieves its own freedom by choice, or out of necessity; and if the latter is the case, then any talk of freedom is a farce, since the process would involve a law no different from any other law.

On the grounds of such arguments, I sought to defend the idea of an absolute freedom which, in a sense, is anterior to itself (i.e, to itself in the form of fulfilled freedom): a kind of freedom which is pure will, and which can unconditionally choose both itself and the negation of itself. In other words, I suggested that the 'I' could choose both 'value' (as described above) and non-value, the two being equally available options.

In this respect, my analysis ascribed a pre-ordained meaning to the paradoxical and irrational condition of the 'empirical state of existence'. This co-existence of finite and infinite, of conditioned and unconditioned, dramatises the choice available to the 'I', which it invests with the need to take a fundamental step. 'Just as fire can affirm the will of fuel to live and blaze, so the "I" which wishes to be sovereign unto itself has the power to absorb its own non-being as the matter from which, alone, the splendour of an absolute life and of absolute actions might spring forth.' In philosophical terms, such an approach left two paths open: the 'path of the other' and 'the path of the Absolute Individual'. From Michelstaedter I had borrowed some important ideas. Michelstaedter had spoken of a 'path of persuasion', which he conceived as the path of the self-subsisting being, which is a foundation and value unto itself, and which does not avoid, but, on the contrary, embraces and resolves its existential deficiency. Michelstaedter contrasted such a path with that of 'rhetoric': the path of those who flee from self-possession and rest on the other, seeking the other as a way to 'persuade their own selves' in the course of their flight; who pursue a dark need, an incessant lust towards the extension of that initial abandonment, avoiding any attempt to halt the whole process by possessive means. Michelstaedter was probably unaware of the fact that such notions essentially correspond to those formulated by Buddhism and of the ancient Mysteries. In Buddhism, the 'path of the other' (which I also termed 'the path of the object') corresponds to *samsāra,*[33] the inferior world of becoming, which arises from thirst and greed; in the ancient Mysteries, this path corresponds to the 'cycle of generation' or necessity. The opposite path is described as the path of the Awakened or Liberated in Buddhism, and as the path of the consecrated in the ancient Mysteries.

One of the boldest and most original features of my philosophical analysis was the fact that I attributed equal validity to the two paths: both paths, I argued, had to be equally possible and equally valid because of the very nature of absolute freedom. For what is truly absolute includes the possibility of both absoluteness and non-absoluteness.

Given its very nature, the 'path of other' cannot structurally and schematically be defined, as it uniformly replicates a basic condition. The only path which could be defined in its constituent paths was 'the path of the Absolute Individual'; and to provide a description of this path was the aim I pursued in the second part of my book *Theory*, and in my work *Phenomenology* as a whole.

I do not wish to discuss the new theory of certainty to which my philosophical system potentially led. I explored this theory in an essay entitled 'The Three Epochs in the Problem of Certainty', which was published in German in the journal *Logos*, and which later became the first section of my book *The Individual and the Becoming of the World* (*L'individuo e il divenire del mondo*, Libreria di Scienze e Lettere, 1926). Rather, I will here provide a general overview of my constructive philosophical approach.

The starting point for my positive definition of a philosophical system was provided by the Idealist theories which I had defined in the course of my previous critique. While the world, according to Idealism, is 'placed' there by the 'I', the individual generally lacks power and 'value' with respect to this act of 'placing'. In order to pave my speculative way, I then began to develop a critique of philosophical realism. In order to justify the 'I''s lack of power, the realist philosopher posits a being which is true and self-sufficient, and which determines the representations, images and sensations by which it is made known to us. Such a philosophical inference, however, is neither episteontologically licit nor compelling (Kant claimed that it constituted a 'transcendent use of the principle of causality'). For one only needs to consider an act which, although carried out by the 'I', is a necessary act – that is to say, an act of 'spontaneity' – to realise how the 'I' is here made to lose its will and its relation to 'value'. This observation alone was sufficient for me to invalidate certain ideas. The path of the Absolute Individual is based on the following imperative: not to flee from existential deficiency, 'not to grant deficiency an existence of its own as a way to avoid its weight' (that is to say: not to define deficiency as a distinct reality such as nature, 'the thing in itself', or God); but rather, to acknowledge the existence of deficiency and render oneself superior to it by facing it and enduring all its weight. One needs to ***become*** that very deficiency, and to conceive of all things upon which he has no power as forms of negativity rather than as separate beings and values (i.e., rather than by identifying both what is rational and what is wished with what is real). One needs to affirm the act which consumes deficiency, 'in such a way that that which did not exist with the lack of activity might now *be*.' In other words, the imperative is not to call 'being' what is non-being. This whole process might almost be defined as the cosmically or ontologically epistemological counterpart of the process which leads he who reacts against any passion or instinct to transform such passion or instinct into a real act by freeing himself from necessity. Thus, ethics and ontology were both present in my philosophical system. Nor was an eschatological background missing: that of nature as the 'lack' of non-being which provides the place for the Absolute Individual to unfold itself as the thing by which nature itself is redeemed and transformed into an absolute being possessing beginning and end (the 'final consummation' or *ekpyrosis*) in itself.

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[33] *Samsāra* is a Sanskrit term which refers to the cycle of death and rebirth, or reincarnation. In Hinduism, the soul is kept within the state of *samsāra* by its inability to free itself from the illusions and desires of the world (or *Māyā* – see note #26, p. 40). Once the soul has attained the highest level of enlightenment, or *moksha,* it is freed from *samsāra.*

My philosophical conclusions implied a transcendence of Stoicism[34] (understood in general terms), as well as a critique of Michelstaedter's position. The Idealistic premises which I accepted indissolubly linked the 'I' to the world, in such a way that the individual cannot escape the world, for the world is his own representation. Certainly, a different path remained open:

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[34] Stoicism was a school of philosophy which originated in Classical Athens, although as a term it continues to be applied today to philosophies which share its general characteristics. Basically, the Stoics believed that it is human emotions which lead individuals into error, and that the only way to lead a truly virtuous life is to transcend the emotions. They also emphasised the importance of logic and reason as the sole paths to genuine knowledge.

the 'path of the other', the path to thirsting identification which attributes real existence and meaning to what is situated outside the individual. In the case of the path of the Absolute Individual, however, man does not isolate himself in abstract sufficiency by opposing the value of his own 'I' to the lack of value of the world (which, although being there, is denied autonomous existence). Given the fact that the individual 'places' the world (although not freely, but 'spontaneously'), he is also responsible for the world. Unless I wish the very core of my own being to be torn apart, I must translate being into 'value'. Such views – a closed circuit which allows for no excuses or escapes – represented almost a return to Gnostic and Manichean ideas of the crucifixion of the cosmic One in the world as the ultimate meaning of the individual's existence (albeit without the same dualism or pessimism). The 'I' of the Stoics and the 'Ego' of Stirner was here merged with the Aristotelian form of the pure act which solves the world of necessity and the life which is mingled with non-life. The most concise expression of such a notion is perhaps found in one page of my *Essays on Magical Idealism*, where I wrote that:

'The act of representation is necessary, but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the real existence of things, given that all things are mediated by an "I". An individual might claim to have placed all things, but merely as an act of spontaneity and not an act of freedom, or of the "I". To claim that an individual, as an "I" or self-sufficient (*autarches*) principle, cannot define himself as the ***unconditioned*** cause of representations (viz. of nature), does not imply that such representations are the product of an "other" (of things which are real and which exist in themselves). Rather, this condition merely suggests that the individual does not have complete control over his own actions, which is still spontaneous action: that such activity has yet to become "moralised", and that the "I", as freedom, is still suffering from a form of "privation". As previously argued, therefore, realism must be rejected ***pour une fin de non recevoir***.[35] Yet when will it be possible to truly affirm the Idealist principle that the "I" places all things? It will only be possible once the individual has transformed the dark passion of the world into a kind of freedom; that is to say: once the individual experiences his action of representation no longer as a form of spontaneity and coexistence of reality and possibility, but rather as a form of unconditioned, willed causation and

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[35] French: 'for a flat refusal'.

power. Faced with such a task, the Idealist philosopher will flee: he will replace true action, which nullifies things by possessing them, with discursive action, which merely acknowledges things and rests upon them. Hence, the Idealist philosopher describes his own *non-being* as "being", and calls true what would, according to justice, be defined as unreal, given that it is the privation of its own power. The Idealist philosopher, then, in a way confirms such privation: for he adores it, and incestuously feeds upon it; incapable of carrying out the required transformation, he surrenders and drowns in things. "Rationality", "Idealism", "historicity", "concrete freedom", "transcendental 'I'", etc., are merely names given to the flight of the Idealist philosopher: merely symbols of his impotence, merely the value forcibly imposed on that which, in comparison to the transformation and moralisation of the "I" (as understood by Weininger and Michelstaedter), is, in point of fact, a lack of value: death, obscurity, and nature.'

One problem remained, however, with regard to my new theory of absolute immanence. Even accepting the possibility of a decisive transformation by means of the path of the Absolute Individual, the starting point of the doctrine – that is to say: the very condition of 'privation' – remained an unexplained mystery. My solution, then, was to deny the very existence of the problem. Firstly, I suggested that the state of 'privation' was only conditionally obscure, in the sense that it only constitutes a form of 'privation' with respect to the self-affirmation of the absolute 'I': were this affirmation of the 'I' not to take place, 'privation' would no longer exist (this is actually the case with those who accept life in its totality, who in Dionysian fashion identify themselves with 'life', etc.). Secondly, I questioned the very notion that what comes first must necessarily be what is fullest and most perfect. Instead, I argued that 'privation' (the term employed to describe the supposed 'non-I') could also be explained as that which naturally belongs to all that exists potentially, and which has the power to unfold in the completion of a perfect act. Such an assumption also allowed me to indulge in one of the fixations which I had not yet freed myself from at the time: the notion of 'value' – understood not in the specific way which I previously defined, but rather in its Idealist moral sense. If what is perfect comes first, I asked, then what is the point of action, effort and struggle on the part of the 'I'? No: existence, truth and certainty are not to be found in the past but in the future: they are tasks. No alterity[36] exists between an individual person and the universal subject; rather, there is a sense of progress: for the individual person is the potentiality of the universal subject, while the universal subject is the actuality of the individual. I even wrote that 'if God exists, then the "I" is not', and argued that the 'creation of God' was a pure possibility of the 'I.' I was later to avoid similar pathos, and attributed any fixation on 'value' and 'creation' to the plebeian ideology of the self-made man (thus putting my aforementioned views somewhat into proportion).

What remained valid of my philosophical analysis was its ontological and quasi-Aristotelian notion of the autonomous, free development of something lesser into something greater, with the highest point of the process being that of the pure act, 'monad of monads' or 'God'. Thus, the kind of dialectic which I employed in my attempt to trace a 'phenomenology of the Absolute Individual' was not the Hegelian dialectic based on the overcoming of opposites and the negation of the 'finite', but rather a 'dialectic of difference', conceived as the passage from indistinctness to distinctness and individuality following increasing levels of integration, completeness and freedom. In this respect, I could have argued that the absolute 'I' does not exist, and that what exists is rather the (contingent) possibility of the 'I' to become absolute.

I also engaged with other technical, speculative problems, such as the issue of the relation between essence and existence, another of the stumbling blocks of abstract Idealism. Idealism had never adequately explained the difference between what is represented (i.e., the concept or essence of a thing) and what is real, and had always fallen back to the idea of immanency. I sought a solution to this problem in the notion of power and of levels of intensity. I suggested that ideas are weak forms of reality, while realities are ideas that are (more) powerful. In other words, I suggested that the difference between ideas and realities is a matter of intensity. Taine[37] had defined perception as a 'real hallucination', whereas Berkeley had distinguished 'real' representation from representation which is of a merely mental kind by referring to the former as 'a more powerful spirit' – ideas which imply a difference in intensity. Another formula I used was to define ideas as potential realities, and realities as actual ideas. This was a bold and dangerous theory, for it was one that led to action. Paradoxically, one could here envision a gradual process whereby the power of an 'I' expands from being the power of thought to that of magical imagination and self-persuasion: to that of persuading others and, ultimately, of persuading and altering reality itself.

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[36] A philosophical term, first defined in its modern usage by Emmanuel Lévinas, which refers to 'otherness', meaning the act of exchanging one's perspective for that of the theoretical other.

[37] Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), a French philosopher and historian who is identified with historicism, naturalism and positivism. Many of his works are available in English.

If similar notions might initially have appeared strange or crazy, a shift in perspective would have been enough to bestow them with much greater credibility. This is where the traditional doctrine of the relation between macrocosm and microcosm came into play. And this is also where I ought to have mentioned the so-called notion of 'intellectual intuition', which was known to Scholasticism,[38] and had again been invoked by Kant in opposition to common forms of knowledge – those of passive sense perception. In the case of my theory, the two modes of knowledge need not be set in contrast; rather, in the context of a progression beyond ordinary human limits, sense perception is to intellectual intuition what potentiality is to act. Scholasticism attributed intellectual intuition not to human beings but to angels. Other traditions, and particularly yoga, had examined the various phases in the creation and unfolding of intellectual intellective intuition up to the very limit of their active and metaphysical union with their objects – a union of both a magical and noetic[39] kind (this is something I discussed in a chapter of my *Essays*, and in my book *Man as Potency*).

I wish to mention two further points with respect to the theory of the Absolute Individual. The first concerns the contrast between rationalism and irrationalism. What is rational does not possess an existence of its own, to the point that it can be opposed to what is irrational. What is rational always conceals what is non-rational as its root and determinative principle. *Sollen*[40] – that is to say: the authoritative character of given laws of rationality (and of logic itself, not to mention the 'autonomous' ethics of mandatory rules) – is merely a manifestation of *müssen*, of 'being forced to'; in other words: of a sort of passivity and powerlessness when faced with a *vis a tergo*.[41] What is equally decadent and removed from the path of the Absolute Individual is to consider what is irrational as an immutable reality, as 'life', 'becoming' and so on: even in cases such as these, the 'I' shows a form of exteriority from itself, while the integrated 'I' accepts irrationality as its own substance or potentiality, which is expressed by what is rational. The greater the potentiality, the more will its manifestations possess coherence, absolute form and laws, becoming a form of 'rationality' on all levels. Thus, even 'truth' is a reflection of potentiality.

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[38] Scholasticism was a theological movement in Europe during the Middle Ages which sought to reconcile the teachings of the Church with Classical Greek philosophy.

[39] See *nous*, defined in note #32, p. 45.

[40] German: 'should be'.

To use paradoxical language again, I might suggest that 'truth is a powerful error; error is a weak truth'. In the case of an integrated 'I', a thing is not wished because it is deemed right, rational or true: on the contrary, a thing appears to be right, rational or true because it has been wished. Any aseity[42] of values is hence ruled out. Having acknowledged this fact, I then pointed to the only possible dichotomy: that between self-centredness, on the one hand, which on an objective level becomes power; and non-self-centredness on the other, which is to say: leaving one's internal throne empty or occupied by ghosts. In such a way, the so-called voluntarism which had once coherently and philosophically been affirmed on a merely theological level through a non-rationalist conceptualisation of divinity (Duns Scotus's[43] idea that it is not God who wishes a thing because it is good, but rather a thing which is good because God wishes it) was here both rendered immanent and applied to man. And yet, here as elsewhere, the chances of an individual ruinously going haywire after embracing such a dangerous doctrine appeared all too evident.

The second point I wanted to mention concerns the field of the extranormal, since the path of the Absolute Individual in various ways sought to avoid the sagging of abstract Idealism, by denouncing the rhetoric and fiction of the 'universal subject' in the assumption that new possibilities might be open beyond the ordinary limits of the human condition. First in my *Essays*

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[41] French: 'force acting from behind.'

[42] Aseity is a theological term referring to an object which exists independently of any other object; hence, it refers to a thing-in-itself, to use Kant's term. Aseity is a condition often ascribed to God, although not exclusively.

[43] John Duns Scotus (1266?-1308) was a prominent theologian of the High Middle Ages. Many of his works are available in English.

(in a chapter of the *Essays* dealing with the 'Supra-normal "I"'), and later in a section of my book *Theory*, I discussed and re-evaluated the Kantian problem of 'possible experience' (*mögliche Erfahrung*) and its transcendental premises. Kant had founded his theory on the assumption that a single human experience exists; and that this theory can be defined, once and for all, by patterns of reason which render human experience such a necessary and constant thing that it can be made the object of '*a priori*[44] synthetic judgments' – something Kant regarded as the very basis of all positive and universal scientific knowledge. In order to justify his theory, Kant spoke of 'categories' and of the transcendental function of the 'I', although in doing so, he bestowed the 'I' with those traits of necessity and incontrovertible determination that can only be posited by actual experience. The development of modern science had already invalidated the premises of Kantian philosophy, and posited necessity had lost its grip on nature. In a landmark essay both unsurpassed and well ahead of its times, Boutroux[45] spoke of the 'contingency of the laws of nature'; and if Euclidian geometry now appeared as only one of many possible geometries, subatomic physics was later destined to embrace the ideas of indeterminism and improbability.[46]

Were the Kantian approach to be applied to the new context of modern science, its only outcome would be a 'transcendental loosening'; that is to say: a different, mobile system of categories. Besides, Kant's 'possible experience' was the most common and ordinary kind of experience: Kant had never considered the transcendental foundations (or possibilities) deriving from experiences which are equally real, such as sleep, dreams, madness and hypnosis – as well as the whole range of extra-normal experiences which the field of psychic research had recently defined. What also ought to have been taken into account is the data acquired by ethnology and the evidence gathered from various traditions with regard to extra-normal phenomenology. The fact that such phenomenology occurs only sporadically and exceptionally, I argued, ought not to justify its exclusion from 'possible experience'. On the whole, 'possible experience' struck me as being rather different from what Kant had examined in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which arbitrarily focused on only one kind of experience. In my writing, I also mentioned a hypothetical case previously examined by Osty,[47] the head of an institute for psychical research: that of an individual possessing all the experiential possibilities and the powers which have positively been ascertained in separate cases and different circumstances. This was sufficient for me to disclose transcendental horizons, and to remove the limit that might have halted or practically confuted my theory of the Absolute Individual.

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[44] *A priori* is a Latin term referring to knowledge that is independent of experience, as opposed to *a posteriori* knowledge, which is dependent on experience. '2+2=4' would be an example of *a priori* knowledge.

[45] Émile Boutroux (see note #19, p. 36). Evola is referring to his book, *The Contingency of the Laws of Nature* (London: Open Court, 1916).

[46] Evola is doubtless referring to the development of quantum mechanics, and in particular the uncertainty principle of Werner Heisenberg, which asserted that the motion of particles is affected by the process of observing it, which means it can never truly be known.

I had to make a point here with regard to the issue of those latent potentialities posited on the basis of all 'possible experience': for part of these experiences is characterised not by 'freedom' and 'value', but by 'spontaneity' and passive action. And this does not apply to the transcendental correlative of the contingent area of worldly things and physical experience alone, as many of the psychical phenomena which are either omitted (such as dreams, which are experienced passively, not actively), or only recorded by psychics, are marked by an unintentional character, and are frequently accompanied by a trance-like state of diminished consciousness. At the time, I pointed to the basic distinction that later served to guide me in the field which I explored in my post-philosophical phase. The distinction in question is that between an extra-normal regressive state, which can be reached by entering the subpersonal, vital, and subconscious, and which I termed 'descending auto-transcendence' (*'autotrascendimento discendente'*); and an extra-normal positive state, which is actually supra-normal, and marked by an inner flight beyond ordinary human personality, by a strengthening of clarity of consciousness, of will and inner freedom. This stage I termed 'ascendant auto-transcendence'. What remained for me to do, once I had thus pointed to the vaster world of 'possible experience', was to engage with the issue of self-realisation, which is conditioned by the 'I' and its inclinations.

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[47] Eugén Osty (1874-1938) was a French physician who was also director of the Institut Métapsychique Internationale. Evola is referring to the case of Rudi Schneider (1908-1957), an Austrian medium who submitted to several examinations of his abilities. In 1930, Schneider worked with Dr. Osty, who used an infrared camera to show that Schneider was capable of moving objects telekinetically from a distance, even while his body was restrained. This experiment was verified by other researchers (although disputed by some critics). See Anita Gregory, *The Strange Case of Rudi Schneider* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985).

In the books written in the philosophical phase of my career, I only touched upon the issue of self-realisation in a cursory way, in my attempt to consolidate the framework of 'Magical Idealism'. In my book *Theory*, I focused on several other problems which I do not wish to discuss here. Rather, I would now like to turn to consider my volume *Phenomenology*, which was originally conceived as the second part of a work – the first part, of course, being *Theory*. For editorial reasons, *Phenomenology* was only published in 1930 by Bocca as a separate volume. In this book, I employed the term 'phenomenology' in its Hegelian rather than Husserlian meaning (for I did not know Husserl at the time – and besides, I am not sure whether Husserl had already published his main books when I was writing *Phenomenology*, in 1924[48]). The term 'phenomenology' implied a definition of those 'epochs' and categories which mark the path of the Absolute Individual. This attempt at definition stemmed from a further critique of Absolute Idealism on my part: for it was clear to me that the highest principle of this philosophy (the Idea, Act, or whatever other name it might be given) had only managed to dominate the whole of experience in 'immanent' terms by becoming itself something increasingly undetermined: by becoming either universal emptiness, or the *a priori*, pure act of Gentile and Weberian 'knowledge'. This highest principle was articulated in poor dialectic terms, and yet it was presented as a container to be filled with all sorts of things, as 'the night in which all cows are black'[49] (that is to say: in which all is 'thought', 'act', etc. – an expression that had been applied by Hegel to the so-called 'philosophy of identity' of Schelling). Besides, I have already mentioned my poor regard at the time for the wretchedness of Italian neo-Hegelians.

In all honesty, by recognising the very need for a doctrine of categories and (at least partly) of 'natural philosophy' which had driven original Idealism, I set out to establish a system where the immanent principle would draw light on the basic elements of our concrete experience; or, rather, of 'possible experience' in the broader sense of the term, as an articulate whole composed of meanings and separate values. The world of primeval spontaneity, the world of human personality and thought, and the world that transcended it all had to be assumed, I suggested, and 'inferred' with respect to an Absolute Individual who wishes his own self-fulfilment or self-expression. The act of 'wishing' on the part of the Absolute Individual is of central importance here, for, as previously mentioned, a different path is also equally open to him: that of the 'object', of *saṃsāra,* of the circle of necessity and of meaninglessness.

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[48] See note #32, p. 45.

[49] This is a quotation from Hegel's Preface to his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. In its original context, Hegel was mocking Schelling's conception of the absolute as a reality devoid of all characteristics.

Certainly, mine was a bold assumption. Like similar philosophical systems conceived by classical Idealism, the system I outlined in *Phenomenology* might have been accused of being based, at least to some extent, on arbitrary choices. Yet, could an objection of this kind truly be raised against a theory founded on the very principle of absolute freedom – and hence, in a way, on choice itself? A theory, that is to say, which announced the primacy of will over 'truth'? Mine was a personal attempt to embrace all possibilities and realities in a single, satisfying worldview. By then I had made up my own mind on the matter of logical persuasion and dialectic frameworks. In the course of my laborious task, I found a confirmation of my theory in the fact that an adequate mental effort is often enough to provide basic meanings with the 'rational' foundation necessary for their systematic unity. I can confidently claim never to have been 'fooled' by 'thought', as happens to those who trust thought, but are unaware of the irrational, existential ground of rationality: who are 'being thought' rather than thinking.

At the same time, in my Introduction to *Phenomenology*, I addressed those people who had followed my recent work, in order to point to the congruency between my own system and traditional non-philosophical doctrines, which are frequently expressed by means of symbols and myths. I also employed the term 'phenomenology' because my job was not that of determining mere logical forms or 'categories', or pure transcendental conditions of experience, but rather experiences.

The distinguishing feature of my system was its attempt to broaden philosophical horizons: in the context of the aforementioned experiences, what pertains to ordinary human experience only figured in my work as one case among many. It is worth quoting a page from the preface of the book: 'I am here taking humanity as a whole as only *one* of the many existential conditions possible for the individual, and one in no way better than the others. Man neither begins nor ends with man, although – aside from the pipe dreams of religious faith and from intellectual constructs, which, in any case, still belong to an exclusively human sphere – modern thought is confined to this plane. Once again, I have here afforded the human condition two possibilities, two great epochs: the epoch of "spontaneity" and that of "domination", both of which feature in my phenomenology as objects of possible experience and possible ways of being within humanity, and at the same time beyond it.' I added: 'The opinion of Idealists, according to whom the unfolding of the spirit has reached its limit with philosophy, art, religion and the ethics of the Absolute State (the "objective spirit"), and is thus destined to come to a halt (I mainly had Hegel and his followers in mind here), strikes me as being limited and reflective of a lack of metaphysical sensibility – a common trait of modern man. Besides, the "modern world", far from being a privileged condition, is itself but one manifestation, one among many cultures; and the very chance of falling prey to such astonishing, *childish* illusions testifies to the absolute freedom of the spirit.'

I would now like to spend a few words on the deductive and constructive framework of *Phenomenology*. At the background stands the Individual, who has placed himself as freedom and sovereignty. Yet 'in order to possess itself, the "I" must first *be* – which is to say: the "I" must simply place itself, with immediacy and spontaneity' in those forms which I defined as forms of 'passive activity'. This placing leads to a series of determinations or 'positions' which have the perfection of 'being' as their limit. On the one hand, a similar description served to define the essential elements of perceptive experience; yet it also allowed to take account of what endures, as the nocturnal residues of primordial states of consciousness, in the thought and experience of so-called 'primitive' peoples, or in similar regressive forms. Labels alone are of limited help, particularly given the particular way in which I have employed various words in my work. Nevertheless, in my work I sought to define the epoch of spontaneity as follows: in the first section: quality, feeling, act, difference, causality, substantiality, alterity (which includes perception, affection, recognisance, expression and revelation). Section two: the potentialities of existence and of organization (biology, personal potentialities). The notion of 'person' appeared at this stage, at the end of the first epoch, not in its ethical sense, but in the form of human individuality and limit, so to speak: as a point of rapture and transition from the natural world.

The force producing the transition from one form to the other arises from the fact that the whole of 'being' and self-placing, according to spontaneity, only takes place in view of the abovementioned higher level. In such a way, the 'I' transcends the limits of 'being' and affirms itself through a 'non-being' which corresponds to being-in-itself. This being-in-itself is then manifested by the 'I' through its self-extinction: through the 'I''s self-definition as the world of things or, more generally, as non-I: as all that to which the individual was previously connected according to 'spontaneity' (through perception, life, movement, etc.). Thus, a second epoch unfolds the epoch of reflection or of personality in its authentic, self-conscious sense, which is also the epoch of images – for the price of an existence based on reflected consciousness is self-alienation. The individual lives in a world of images, of thoughts, in the form of a dualist existence (with subject facing object).

The whole of the second epoch, in its various articulations, corresponds to the activities by means of which the subject attempts to translate the world of externalised being (which has become the world of the 'object') into the forms of reflected consciousness. In my analysis, I outlined two sections: the first includes finite experience, active personality, self-preservation (along with cooperation and sexuality), and morality; the second section includes scientific, philosophical and mystical consciousness, as well as pure art and, ultimately, the Individual as the very limit that defines a new point of rapture, and the transition away from the epoch itself. Just as the self-consciousness of the personal principle affirms itself by breaking away from being and standing in contrast to it, so the principle of the Individual – which is the first manifestation of the Absolute Individual – in its original form implies a kind self-extinction: an opposition to the whole world of reflection and of images, which it perceives as both empty and unreal. The principle of the Individual, in other words, implies a return to being, but a being possessed of real freedom and potency: a trans-personal rather than pre-personal being.

This new epoch renews the movement of resumption, raising and transmutation: once the world of images and of dualist, reflected consciousness has been brushed away, almost like a framework no longer needed, the individual, after plunging into the depths of the spirit, resumes his own contact with the primary world in order to transform it into 'value' (understood in the specific sense of the term that I have previously defined, and which implies an idea of absolute meaning, autarchy, freedom and sovereignty). The third epoch, then, is more genuinely the field of 'Magical Idealism', as it conterms experiences which are all transcendent to some extent. With the definition of this third epoch, I attempted to deduce and to dialectically translate the content of a range of disciplines and experiences which I had gathered in the fields of asceticism and traditional, initiatory and esoteric doctrine. The aspects of the third epoch are as follows: the first section: the experience of Fire, suffering and love, dynamic evocation, the world of the Word, the characterising individual; Section two: Master of the limit, Master of the vortex, Absolute Individual. Towards the end of *Phenomenology*, dramatisation took the place of philosophical and dialectic modes of expression: by the use of surreal images and of an almost lyrical impetuosity, I attempted to convey the significance of the highest point in the process which I had described, the absolute which appeared as both the first principle and the immutable, unnameable substrate of the whole phenomenology. (At the end of my description, in examining the uppermost peak of absolute freedom, I sought to define a number of subjects, each possessing a personal, differentiated kind of experience, path and movement.)

While in speculative terms I presented the various forms of the phenomenological process according to the articulation and sequence which I have here outlined, both articulation and sequence possessed a merely formal character. The phenomenological process, in other words, did not consist of a continuous line, or of a more or less obligatory itinerary, but rather of a number of possibilities, a number of separate and discontinuous possible ways of experiencing the value and potency of the Absolute Individual. Hence, each category could contain the whole: in each category, the Absolute Individual was present in its entirety with absolute freedom. I clarified this point when I came to discuss the peak of the process, thus completely banishing the idea of necessity. In my preface to *Theory*, I wrote: 'No doubt, mine will seem like a bold claim: what I am suggesting here is that the peak of philosophy is transcendental Idealism, which itself inevitably culminates in Magical Idealism. Beyond Magical Idealism, nothing remains for philosophy unless, of course, philosophy is to go bankrupt and become the mere expression of personal opinions subject to present contingencies. If a further development beyond Magical Idealism is to be imagined, this will be not a philosophical development, but a kind of action... My duty has been that of leading Western speculative thought towards this further step. I am not suggesting that my work contains all that might be done... But this really is not the point. I believe that my work is enough to allow those who wish to understand to understand. As for all those people who do not wish to understand, were I even to devote the ample time ahead of me to better consolidate and further develop my system, I am sure they would still manage to find things to criticise and refute in my work. The only thing which truly matters is for the need I have pointed out to be addressed; what matters is for individuals to understand the meaning of and the need for the final philosophical step which I have outlined, and to move ahead… I will have the chance, I am sure, to meet again with those people who are truly moving in this direction…'

Just as I had previously ended my brief artistic experience, I now brought my strictly philosophical phase to an end. As I had previously abandoned painting, abstract art and the 'alchemy of words', I now set genuinely speculative work aside once and for all. By then, I had fulfilled the impersonal task that I had felt the need to carry out in the field of philosophy.

How was my doctrine of the Absolute Individual received at the time? It was largely ignored, as was to be expected in the case of any analysis decisively removed from the beaten track. My work was mostly noted by writers who were not specialists in the field. I still have some of these reports at hand, which only survive because I had stored them together with an editorial notice. Nicola Moscardelli,[50] a poet I hold in great esteem, wrote: 'Evola is one of those individuals who display all the traits of an epoch. He is such a strong personality that few people dare approach him – and not because they perceive him as somehow remote, but rather because Evola is too close to them; and this closeness is what they fear.' These instead are the words of psychologist Roberto Assagioli:[51] 'No doubt, an innovative and bold piece of writing, one thoroughly planned, which can neither be ignored nor easily refuted. While such a work might baffle and disconcert those unfamiliar with spiritual nourishment of this kind, it also points those who are eager to a path leading to the boldest and noblest, the most dangerous and most fascinating adventure which the human spirit can undertake.' Catholic author

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[50] Nicola Moscardelli (1894-1943) was associated with Futurism. An anthology of his work was translated as *The Third State* (Poets' Press, 1953).

[51] Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) was the founder of Psychosynthesis, an alternative theory of psychology which was grounded in science, but which accepted the existence of a soul. It also postulated that individuals possess psychic abilities which must be cultivated. Several of his works are available in English.

I Aquilanti: 'The philosophical system of Evola – a brilliant, refined and lucid writer – presents the individual as a flaming reality. Everything within him is action, power and dominance. Barriers crumble... God is not found in infinity: infinity is reached in ourselves and it is we who, in the darkness, become the creators of God.' Professor A. Belluigi:[52] 'In the bleak landscape of philosophical literature, the thought of J. Evola shines with a bold, innovative spirit which is full of future promise, free and at the same time strong. E. addresses needs which are deeply felt by all genuinely modern spirits and gives proof of being a confident guide on the mountain peak.' To finish, here are the words of Idealist philosopher L. Grassi:[53] 'There is something in E.'s endeavour which irresistibly attracts us. The acuteness of E.'s thought is striking, his familiarity with Eastern and magical doctrines exceptional, and his style most lucid: like a sharp sword, it severs the dense vegetation of rhetoric at its very roots.' Both pedagogue Gino Ferretti[54] and critic Adriano Tilgher[55] showed particular interest in my work. Tilgher himself had been a follower of Transcendental Idealism, and later accepted my critique of Gentile's philosophy (which was the predominant philosophy at the time). Tilgher included some essays of mine in a volume of collected works by Italian philosophers of the post-war period (later, when I chose to abandon speculative thought in favour of fields where Tilgher's intellectualist outlook prevented him from following me, he accused me of having 'lost my way'). On the other hand, the mainstream press and official culture was always to turn a deaf ear to my work. But this was to be expected. Aside from amateurish attempts at philosophical essay-writing occasionally appearing in newspapers, philosophy in Italy was a profession: the profession of university professors, with their cliques and factions. In order to make oneself known, it was necessary to belong to that milieu, where works are published only as a means for career advancement, and thought is subordinate to teaching. I, of course, did not belong to such a milieu at all.

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[52] The only Professor A. Belluigi I can identify is Arnaldo Belluigi, who published a book on Einstein's Theory of Relativity in Rome in 1922. Apparently, by the 1930s, he had left academia and became the head of a Geophysical Department at an Italian oil company.

[53] Leonardo Grassi (1873-1961) was a Professor of Ethics at the University of Catania. Like Evola, he later wrote for *La Torre*. None of his writings have been translated into English.

[54] Gino Ferretti was a Sicilian professor at the University of Palermo. He proposed an 'active pedagogy' theory of modern education, influenced by John Dewey. He wrote a number of books, but the only English version I could locate was an article entitled 'Creation, Idealism and a New Aestheticism' which was published in Volume XIII (1935) of *The Philosopher*, the Journal of the Philosophical Society of England.

[55] Adriano Tilgher (1887-1941) was an Italian philosopher and drama critic, and his dramatic theories were influential on Luigi Pirandello. In his philosophical writings, he ultimately came to reject metaphysics entirely. The only book of his to be translated is *Work: What It Has Meant to Men through the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1930).

But would it really have been possible to conceive of a theory of the Absolute Individual entirely removed from the university milieu? In other words, how could I suppose that the mere rigour of some of my deductions might have led some of those *petit-bourgeois*, those professional men of speculative thought, to abandon their world of ideas and head for unfamiliar adventures? All the extra-philosophical references which abounded in my philosophical system served as a convenient excuse for its ostracism. It was easy to dismiss a system which featured initiation, 'magic' and relics of superstition. The fact that I had presented all these elements in rigorous philosophical terms hardly mattered.

On the other hand, I myself was probably mistaken with regard to those individuals whom I thought my speculative endeavours might benefit in practical terms. Mine was a philosophical introduction to a non-philosophical world: as such, it might prove of genuine use only in those rare cases where philosophy had ultimately led to a profound existential crisis. Yet, I should also have considered a fact of which I only later became aware: that philosophical precedents to my work – i.e., the field of discursive, abstract thought – represented the worst means to positively overcome an existential crisis such as this in the way I suggested – which is to say: by embracing disciplines of self-realisation. Besides, my philosophical exposition would have proven equally superfluous to those who had already taken such a step. It is for this reason that I actually advised those individuals who continued to follow my work in the period which followed not to read those three philosophical books of mine at all. In the field that I subsequently approached, there was no need to 'prove' or 'deduce' anything, nor even to 'discuss' anything. Rather, it was a matter of either recognising or not recognising certain principles and truths on the basis of one's inclinations, one's inborn sensitivity and inner awakening.

Nevertheless, with my philosophical writing I had done what I believed needed to be done. Many years later – twenty-five years later – I was to read those books again. By approaching them almost as if they were someone else's works, I believe I have evaluated them quite objectively. I could not help noticing the vigour of their thought, the wealth of the problems they posed, and the boldness of the solutions they offered – all of which were rare features in the works of my contemporaries. I also noticed that these books of mine anticipated a number of issues which later became rather fashionable, particularly in the context of existentialism. After all, the path of the Absolute Individual was, in a way, the path of 'positive existentialism':[56] the existentialism of a man who has not been overcome by his metaphysical 'condition', and by the exasperation such a condition entails in an age such as ours.

In the field of profane culture, then, I would say that these works of mine ought not to be entirely forgotten. In 1949, finding myself with a little extra time on my hands, I began working on a new edition of *Theory of the Absolute Individual*, which I sought to correct by replacing certain formulas with others, which I deemed more precise and mature. As the first edition of the volume had long been out of print, I believe that a reprint of the book – which at the moment of my writing has yet to be produced – might be of documentary and testimonial worth. Yet in practical terms, such worth will be of use to very few people – unless, of course, some representative of that official 'culture' from which I have always distanced myself intentionally chooses to draw attention to the book.

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[56] Positive existentialism was a philosophical movement in Italy that was largely identified with Nicola Abbagnano (1901-1990), who coined the term. He attacked the existentialism of Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre for what he perceived as a limiting view of human freedom, and, under the influence of pragmatism, he attempted to use the metaphysical foundations of existentialism to develop a more liberating philosophy. Some of his writings on this matter were translated in *Critical Existentialism* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1969). In English, a similar effort to redefine existentialism in positive terms was made by the English author Colin Wilson (b. 1931) in his early, philosophical works such as *The Outsider* (1956).

MY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE EAST AND 'PAGAN' MYTH

I cannot easily assign the books that I subsequently came to write to a specific phase in my career with any degree of certainty, since the date of their publication does not coincide with the period in which they were actually written. As I previously mentioned, while I had finished writing *Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* around 1924, I only published *Phenomenology* in 1930, when I had already published two other books: *Man as Potency* and *Pagan Imperialism* (*Imperialismo pagano*).

From the point of view of chronology rather than content, *Man as Potency* belongs to the period of time between my philosophical stage and what followed it. The book shows influences from the former, philosophical stage of my career, although it focuses on doctrines that are neither philosophical nor Western: the doctrines of Tantrism. The subtitle of the first edition of this book was 'The Metaphysics and Methods of Self-Realisation of the *Tantras*'. To a certain extent, I agreed to write this book at the behest of the publishing house Atanòr. As Atanòr was hoping to attract many readers thanks to the intriguing and innovative character of the subject, they did not hesitate to publish the book in 1925.

A completely revised second edition of *Man as Potency* was published by Bocca in 1949 under the title of *The Yoga of Power* (*Lo Yoga della potenza*). The subtitle of the book was also simplified to 'Essays on the *Tantras*'.

Only in this second edition of the book did I explore the place of the *Tantras* within Hinduism. The basic themes of these texts are revealing of a substrate of aboriginal traditions and cults which predate the Aryan conquest. The *Tantras* provide the glimpse of a predominantly 'gynecocratic' civilisation, which is to say: a civilisation where the essence and sovereign power of the universe is identified with a feminine principle or goddess. On a cultural and mythological level, the goddess possesses both terrible, destructive traits and luminous, beneficent and maternal ones. Clear analogies exist between this figure and the great goddesses which are described in similar myths from the archaic Mediterranean world. Yet, in the symbiosis that followed the Aryan conquest of India, these original myths were transposed on a metaphysical level. With the goddess possessing the essential nature of *Shakti* – a term that might be translated as 'power' – the doctrine emerged according to which power is the ultimate principle of the universe. This notion provided the foundation for those treatments of Tantrism which captured my attention: those found in the *Shakti-Tantras*.

The first edition of my book began with a section no longer featured in the second edition, since the latter was published at a time when all the problems previously discussed in this section had already been solved. This section was entitled 'The Spirit of the *Tantras* in Its Relation to East and West', and was conceived as 'a study of the existing relations between Eastern and Western spirit' aimed at 'defining the point of view from which the doctrine of the *Shakti-Tantras* will be examined in the book, and the way in which this doctrine might be employed as a way to develop the values permeating contemporary European culture.' With this aim in mind, I defined various methods – methods I fortunately only partly applied – of 'translating' the foundations of the Tantric system into the language of speculative thought, as Tantrism was based not on speculation, but on spiritual experiences which had chiefly been expressed by the use of images and symbols. Only by means of a similar translation, I argued, could the East actively exert its influence on the West.

This section in the first edition of the book is revealing of the fact that I was still prey to certain whims at the time, which I had not entirely overcome. As for the issue of East and West, my work discussed the theories of Hegel, Steiner and Keyserling concerning the relation of the Eastern worldview and ideals to those of the West. Although some of the points I raised were certainly valid, my reference to writers like Steiner and Keyserling was inappropriate, for such authors were simply not worthy of being taken seriously. Nevertheless, my discussion led me to refute the widespread assumption that the East as a whole is permeated by world-denying escapism, whereas the West is both world-affirming and based on the ideal of the self-conscious, dominating personality. No doubt, some of the points I raised in this section of the book were later to strike me as utterly absurd. For instance, I here spoke of a 'progression of the Western spirit beyond pessimism and Christian dualism' through the gradual affirmation of man in humanist, and later immanent and active terms – an affirmation, I argued, which only needed to be completed by an Eastern contribution. Despite similar whims on my part, what remained valid was my definition of the antithesis between two basic ideals: the ideal of 'liberation' and that of 'freedom'. While India has chiefly expressed the former ideal and the West the latter, the Tantric system, with its conceptualisation of the world as power, warns against any misleading attempt to draw general conclusions on the matter. Moreover, the transcendental affirmation of the 'I' is more widespread in the East, to the extent that it is possible to speak of 'unrealism' as one of the distinctive traits of modern Western man and of his civilisation, which appear both active and self-affirmative from an external perspective.

Another fact I ought to have mentioned in this section of the book is that the East also includes Iran, China and Japan – civilisations which generally show none of the 'escapist' traits that can be ascribed to some aspects of Indian civilisation. What I did note was the fact that the *Tantras* appear far removed from those Vedantist doctrines that interpret the world as an illusion. The *Tantras* conceive of *Shakti* as a kind of 'active *Brahman*'[1] rather than as the pure infinity of conscience. *Māyā* is here replaced with *Māyā-Shakti*, i.e., that 'power' which manifests and affirms itself in the form of cosmogonic magic. Besides, according to what might be termed Tantric historiography, the Tantric system conveys those truths and those spiritual paths most adequate in the so-called *kali-yuga* (or 'dark age'). Because of the profound changes which characterise the *kali-yuga*, general existential conditions in this age differ from the original conditions on the basis of which the doctrines of the *Védas* had first been formulated. It is elementary forces which now prevail: man finds himself connected to such forces and unable to retreat; hence, man must face these forces, control them and transform them, if he wishes to find liberation and freedom. The path to this goal can no longer be the purely intellectual path, nor the ascetic-contemplative path, nor the ritual one. Pure knowledge in our day must lead to action: for this reason, Tantrism describes itself as *sadhana-shastra*: a system based on techniques, and on a concrete effort towards self-realisation. According to the Tantric perspective, knowledge must serve as a means towards self-realisation and radical self-transformation. One Tantric text explains that: 'Each (doctrinal) system is purely the means to an end: it is useless, if one does not yet know the Goddess (that is to say: if one has yet to unite with *Shakti*, or power); and it is useless, if one already knows Her.' In another text it is said that: 'It is like a woman to strive to establish superiority by means of discursive arguments; it is like a man to conquer the world with one's own power.' A common analogy is that between Tantrism and medicine: the truth of each doctrine is proven by its fruits, and not by reasoning alone. Clearly, the 'East' in question here is of a very different sort from the stereotypical East that many Westerners have in mind. I was the first writer in Italy to appreciate and make this particular East known: what Sir John Woodroffe did in the English language, I did in Italian.

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[1] *Brahman* is the Hindu term for the absolute reality that lies behind all things, including the world of the senses and the gods themselves.

Overall, the *Tantras* reflect the development of one central component of Eastern metaphysics: an experimentalism that is not confined to empirical experience and sense perception. This is where I first encountered the kind of broadening of Kantian 'possible experience' that I had sought speculatively to establish in the philosophical books I previously mentioned. In this respect, *Man as Potency* voiced the chief points of my critique against modern scientific knowledge and the exclusively technological power on which such knowledge is based. In my book, I described these modern scientific notions as both illusory and irrelevant: as forms of knowledge and power which are merely founded on utilitarian and democratic principles, rather than on the inner superiority of the individual and on the transformation of his existential state; of his actual, direct relations with the world; and of the meaning of his life. This, as Michelstaedter would put it, is the 'rhetoric' of power in modern civilisation: man always stays the same; or rather, man becomes increasingly 'alienated': even if knowledge of the physical and phenomenological world were to give man the power to destroy a whole planet at the mere pressing of a button, he would still remain only a shadow, a creature remote from its own essence. These are the issues which I further came to develop in the course of my critique of modern civilisation: my treatment of such issues in 1927 anticipated what several thinkers acknowledged at a later date. Yet, these thinkers did not possess the positive points of reference which might have provided their critique with both verve and solidity: for, in order to possess similar points of reference, it would have been necessary for these writers to embrace the values of a world which existed well beyond their own limited horizons.

Tantric literature is both vast and diverse. As I already mentioned, my main interest lay in the *Shakti-Tantras*, the *Tantras* of Power (or *Shakti*). The so-called 'Left-Hand Path' – that of Kaulas, Siddhas and Viras – combines the aforementioned Tantric worldview with a doctrine of the *Übermensch* which would put Nietzsche to shame. The East as a whole has generally avoided the fetish of morality: at a higher level, every moral, for Eastern thought, simply represents the means to an end. A classic illustration of this point is the Buddhist portrayal of law as a raft that is built to cross a stream and later discarded.[2] The Vira – which is to say: the 'heroic' man of Tantrism – seeks to sever all bonds, to overcome all duality between good and evil, honour and shame, virtue and guilt. Tantrism is the supreme path of the absolute absence of law – of *shvecchacarī*, a word meaning 'he whose law is his own will'. Tantrism provides a specific reading of the symbolism of washing or changing oneself, as well as that of the 'virgin' (the 'virgin', in Tantric texts, stands for a will which, by means of specific disciplines, has rendered itself pure and unconditioned from everything that is not its own inviolable and invulnerable self). Some Tantric texts point to the chief taboos to be overcome: pity, the tendency towards disappointment (which is overcome by the development of equity when faced with success or failure, happiness or misery, etc.), shame, ideas of sin and disgust, as well as all that which pertains to family and caste, conventions and forms of ritual, and sex taboos (even the idea of incest – these texts explain – ought not make a Kaula shudder). Similar doctrines reveal how little the East – or at least part of the East – has to learn from the 'free spirits' of the West – the difference here being that, in the case of the East, the infringement of taboos is not confined to individualist anarchism or Stirnerian notions of the 'Ego', but is rather subject to, or presupposes, forms of self-transcendence.

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[2] This is from Section VI of the *Vajracchedika-prajñaparamita-sutra*, or the *Diamond Sutra*. In it, the Buddha says: 'My teaching of the Good Law is to be likened unto a raft. Does a man who has safely crossed a flood upon a raft continue his journey carrying that raft upon his head?', according to the translation of A.F. Price in *The Diamond Sutra, or the Jewel of Transcendental Wisdom* (London: Buddhist Society, 1955).

Even liminal forms of 'immanentism' found fertile ground in the East, especially within Tantrism itself. The idea of 'becoming a god' was perceived as blasphemous and Luciferian in the West, given the theistic, Christian and creationist premises of Western thought. By contrast, the notion of the deep identity of the Self, or *ātma,* with *Brahman*, the absolute principle of the universe, and the formula which expresses it – 'I am *Brahman*' or 'I am Him' (*so'ham*, which in Tantrism became *sa'ham*: 'I am Her', i.e., *Shakti*, or Power) were all widely perceived in the East as truths marking the path of knowledge and the destruction of that 'ignorance' (*avidyā*) which alone leads man to believe that he is merely human. Further, such notions arose in an Eastern context devoid of any sinister or titanic overtones.

Both editions of my book on Tantrism contained two main sections. The first section was entitled 'The Doctrine of Power'. This represented the metaphysical section of the book, where I described the various phases, levels and changes which lead from the highest point – the unconditioned – first to the world of the elements and of nature (here not exclusively considered in its physical aspects), and ultimately to the human condition itself. One of the names given to this process is *pravrtti-marga*, which is to say: the binding path, the path leading to identification with forms and determinations. This path is then followed by *nivrtti-marga*: the path of detachment, revulsion, and transcendence, which has man as its starting point. This led me from metaphysics to the issue of practice and yoga.

Essentially, the plan I had adopted in my treatment of the phenomenology of the Absolute Individual had been no different. As for the first section of my book on Tantrism, I believe that my attempt to present an overview of the complex Hindu and Tantric theories on the primary elements (or *tattva*) proved more intelligible than that which is found in most specialist publications on the subject. Woodroffe himself, who had spent thirty years of his life in direct contact with Tantric pandits in India, acknowledged the validity of many of my interpretations in a number of letters that the two of us exchanged.

As for the second section of the book, in the first edition it was entitled 'The Technique of Power'; in the second, 'The Yoga of Power'. The former title was perhaps more appropriate: after all, yoga only comprised one of the many subjects discussed in the section. Other subjects included a number of preparatory disciplines, as well as the so-called 'secret ritual', which comprises specific methods of spiritual elevation and transformation of naturalistic, bound existence. The kind of yoga I specifically discussed was *hatha-yoga* (i.e., 'violent yoga') or *kundalinī-yoga*, which is regarded as being closely connected to Tantrism. Unlike *dhyana-yoga* or *jñana-yoga*, *kundalinī-yoga* is not of a purely contemplative and intellectual character. Although it presupposes an adequate psychical and mental training, *kundalinī-yoga* takes the body as its starting point and tool – the body not in the form known by Western anatomy and physiology, but in the form which also includes the kind of deep, transbiological energies which are not usually perceived by ordinary consciousness (particularly in the case of modern man). These forces correspond to those elements and powers of the universe which the thousand-year-old hyperphysical physiology of the East has studied just as systematically as the West has studied human organs. As for the term *'kundalinī-yoga'*, it is indicative of a method that employs *kundalinī* as a means towards de-conditioning and liberation – *kundalinī* being the 'power', or *Shakti*, which is present, albeit latently, at the very root of the psycho-physical organism.

One of the most significant features of Tantrism is its notion of the unity of *bhoga* and *yoga*, which is to say: of enjoyment (i.e., enjoyment of the various experiences and possibilities open to man), and liberation or ascesis. Tantric texts explain that other schools conceive of *bhoga* and *yoga* as two mutually exclusive paths (so that he who enjoys material things is not regarded as a liberated soul or ascetic, while he who is a liberated soul or ascetic is thought not to enjoy material things); but the texts add that in Tantrism, this is not the case, for 'according to the path of the Kaulas, enjoyment becomes perfect yoga, and the world itself becomes the place for liberation': for 'without power, liberation is a farce'. Tantrism advocates a paradoxical embracing of the world of life and experience – including its most intense and dangerous sides – but in a detached way. Ultimately, Tantrism is based on the 'transformation of poison into remedy'; i.e., on the use of all powers and experiences ordinarily leading to greater attachment, ruin and perdition, as a means to liberation and enlightenment. It is in this context that Tantrism expresses the ideal of liberation, not as a form of 'escapism', but as concrete and immanent freedom: the very ideal which the West has pursued and promoted in all possible ways, yet only in an intellectual, degraded, materialist and trite way.

In the second edition of the book I added much new material. For instance, I explored Vajrayana (Buddhist Tantrism) – a subject which I had overlooked out of ignorance when writing the first edition of the book. In the second edition, I also corrected or elucidated a number of points I had raised: I removed various 'critical' appendages, and further developed certain sections. This was the case with the chapter dealing with Tantric sexual practices, a subject that had been a matter of scandal among Western 'spiritualists', including Madame Blavatsky, who had described Tantrism as 'black magic of the worst kind' (this is, of course, revealing of how little Theosophists – but also Anthroposophists – actually knew about Eastern doctrines). This chapter of the book also contains some of the fundamental ideas that I developed in one of my latest books: *The Metaphysics of Sex* (*Metafisica del sesso*).

One of the characteristics which distinguishes the first edition of my book on Tantrism from the second is a shift of emphasis away from the notion of 'power'. After all, the use of the term *Shakti* to describe the highest principle is somewhat misleading. No doubt, Tantric texts frequently refer to *Mahā Shakti:* the Great or Supreme Power which is the ground of all things. Yet, this highest principle is best described as that which – like Plotinus' One[3] – embraces all possibilities. In accordance with all esoteric doctrine, Hindu metaphysics and mythology generally describe *Shakti* (Power) as the eternal feminine principle which has its counterpart in the eternal masculine principle – symbolised, in Tantrism, by the figure of *Shiva.* Just as *Shakti* is dynamic, productive and changing, so *Shiva* is immobile, luminous, and detached. Just as, in Hindu cosmology, the union of *Shiva* and *Shakti* engenders the universe, so the mystery of the inner transformation of the human being and the highest principle of freedom are described as the union, within man, of the two principles – rather than as a self-abandonment to the pure, unrestrained power of *Shakti*.

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[3] Plotinus (204?-270) was a Greek philosopher who was the founder of the school of Neoplatonism. His concept of the One was of that which must underlie all that exists, but which is also beyond all concepts or dualities. The One cannot be defined as a conscious being, such as the monotheistic God, which wills the universe into existence, since the One would be beyond the duality of thought and thinker. The reality that we know was understood by him as being merely an emanation from the One. See Plotinus' *The Enneads,* first treatise, chapter six, which exists in many translations.

The practical consequence of this conceptualisation of *Shakti* in Tantrism is the Tantric promotion of an 'Olympian transformation' of the individual, who is to banish all forms of 'titanic', pandemic and chaotically ecstatic deviation. In such a way, Tantrism prevented the adoption of potentially catastrophic approaches: for only in the case of those individuals possessing a *Shiva* nature does the Left-Hand Path, or Path of the Kaulas, not lead to perdition and regression. Tantric doctrine thus appeared to embody values I had already encountered in the works of Lao Tzu and, even earlier, in my own approach to Dadaism.

In my writing, I attempted to warn the reader of the kind of dangers and misunderstandings I have just mentioned – dangers due to the non-Western nature of Tantric doctrine – by means of both specific, preliminary remarks of an existential character, and of positive references to other traditions. Tantrism generally assumes the presence of a spiritual master or guru, although it also teaches that the Tantric disciple who has reached the end of his journey 'must have the guru under his feet' (which is to say that the disciple must free himself completely). The greatest danger, I argued, was posed by the very encounter of Westerners with Tantric doctrine, a doctrine which is, apparently, highly congenial to the Western character. In this respect, I must confess that in writing the original conclusion to *Man as Potency*, I did not take the necessary precautions; for, in this first conclusion, I praised the vision of Tantric initiates in almost Nietzschean terms, particularly by contrasting it with that of Christianity. I wrote:

'By contrast to the vision embraced by multitudes of individuals who, unconscious victims of despair, seek each other's company and love, huddled together like children in a storm, seeking a taste of those values they lack in their common bond and common surrender to the omnipotent Lord, the vision rises of those free individuals, those Saved from the Waters, that Race Under No King, Those Who Breathe: luminous, self-sufficient beings who trample on all laws and "exist in themselves". Those who ask not but yield forth from the over-abundance of their own power and light; those who do not humble themselves to prove equal to others or to love, but who remain unattached; those who lead a resolute life and tend towards an increasingly elevated form of existence by following a hierarchical order which comes, not from on high, but from the intensity of their own being. This race of men with terrible gaze, this race of Lords, stands in need of no consolation, of no gods or Providence... This race moves freely in a world "no longer tainted by the spirit" – a world which is free from human feelings, hopes, doctrines, faiths, values, perceptions, words and passions; a world which has been led back to the crude nature of its own pure power. When faced with such a power, who would fail to recognise how weak and cadaverous the knowledge and "virtue" of the "servants of God" is, of those creatures who, weighed down by "sin" and a "guilty conscience", pursue the sole aim of levelling, gathering and binding all things together?' (I then continued along similar lines.)

Such words on my part actually sounded rather 'Western', and were reflective of certain problematic features of my ideal of the Absolute Individual. In the second edition of the book, by way of warning, I felt the need to point out that the Tantric system is based on a crucial premise: the presence of a 'transformative' and mystical element, and of a kind of *metanoia* (or change of polarity).

What I have just described reveals the chief (albeit extraneous and contingent) limit of this work of mine. Were Western man – who is the person less qualified (from an existential, if not intellectual point of view) to pursue certain disciplines – to embrace Tantrism directly in other than a purely theoretical fashion, he would almost inevitably fall victim to a destructive short-circuit, of madness or self-annihilation. It is in such terms that I personally interpreted the lives of Nietzsche, Michelstaedter and Weininger (among others), although these individuals had been far from accepting the most radical consequences implied by certain truths. More generally, my three philosophical books might have conveyed the erroneous idea of a continuous development in time (a kind of 'progression', to which much significance was accorded because of systematic reasons); of a development almost possessing eschatological overtones. On the contrary, what my books sought to emphasise was the idea of a sudden jump to a different existential level, a return to the doctrine of multiple levels of being, and a change in polarity. Even in the period which followed my work on Tantrism, when I devoted myself to traditional studies, I only gradually came to define such central points with due clarity.

The peak of this problematically radical, almost Nietzschean tendency in my work can be found in an essay I initially published in French, under the title of 'Beyond Nietzsche' ('Par delà Nietzsche'), in the second volume (1926-1927) of *900* – a collection of writings issued as a supplement of *La Voce,* and edited by C. Malaparte[4] and M. Bontempelli[5] (who at the time was flirting with 'magical realism'). Later, the essay became the second part of my volume *The Individual and the Becoming of the World* (*L'individuo e il divenire del mondo*), while extracts of it appeared in an anthology of contemporary Italian philosophers edited by A. Tilgher.[6]

I had composed this essay in a state of lucid intellectual vertigo. Despite its rather strained style – a style questionable from a literary point of view because of its use of exaggerated terms and images – the work certainly contained a certain 'drive': for when I once read the essay at a conference and attempted to stir those feelings which I had personally felt when writing the text, there were people among the audience who even experienced visions and hallucinations. This work of mine began by developing Nietzschean ideas on the possibility of solving absolute nihilism by means of a positive, 'Dionysian' approach. In the essay, I largely agreed with Nietzsche's interpretation of Apollo and Dionysus[7] – an interpretation that I was later to reject in all cases in which it claimed not merely to convey the meaning conventionally attributed to the two gods, but to reflect the genuine and most profound meaning of Apollo and Dionysus as understood in the ancient world. In the essay, this analysis was then followed by an interpretation of the idea of Fall in the form of myth. I here described the birth of man as an act of separation from being, immortality and life ('God'), man affirming his own self in that higher value which makes him the 'Lord of Yes and No' and the 'Lord of Two Natures' – i.e., he who is 'superior to the very gods in his possession of both a human and an immortal nature, of both finite and infinite' (the same formula was also employed in the *Corpus Hermeticum*[8]).

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[4] Curzio Malaparte (1898-1957) was an avant-garde Italian writer and journalist. Originally a Fascist supporter, he turned against Fascism after covering the war on the Eastern Front for the Italian newspapers (documented in his books *Kaputt* and *The Volga Rises in Europe*). Several of his works have been translated.

[5] Massimo Bontempelli (1878-1960) was a prominent Italian writer, and he was quite active in the European literary avant-garde of the 1920s (James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke and Virginia Woolf also served on the editorial board of *900*). He was also a supporter of Fascism. He is indeed considered one of the literary founders of magical realism (today, more closely associated with Latin American literature), in which mystical elements are introduced into an otherwise conventional setting. Several of his works have recently been translated.

[6] *Anthology of Italian Philosophy of the Post-War Period (Antologia dei Filosogi Italiani del dopoguerra* [Modena: Guanda Ed., 1937]).

[7] Nietzsche defines this duality in his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. He himself later came to reject these conclusions.

Such an act, I suggested, which 'embodies the collapse of an entire world', is not enough for the individual, who is struck and overcome by fear: only then does the act of man truly become his 'Fall'. From this terror and Fall, I derived the main forms in which the world presents itself to human eyes: it is the terror and Fall of man which give rise to space, visual exteriority, the objective limit of things, and the 'reality' of space ('an incorporation of that fear which halts the incomplete individual on the edge of the abyss of Dionysian power'). The 'reality' of space then engenders time and becoming, the system of 'causality' and 'finality', and so on. All such things are the products of the original fear of man, of the horror man originally feels for the void, and of the soothing Apollonian illusion.

By contrast, I outlined the path of the individual who destroys his fears, who regains his original willpower, who gets rid of all the products and symbols of his own incompleteness. The individual, I suggested, can find a positive and challenging value in guilt and infraction as the means to such an end. In my essay, I also referred to ancient sacrificial killings, and to the transposition of the tragic sacrificial act on an inner level, as an action progressively performed on one's own self, at the very root of one's own being. I here referred to those techniques that are employed first to remove the 'Apollonian' appearance of perceived objects, and then – following the disintegration of the limit posed by original terror – to resume a 'Dionysian' contact with elementary forces, in accordance with the absolute freedom behind the whole process.

A distinctive feature of my essay was its description of Mystery doctrines as the embodiment of those truths possessed by individuals who have not been broken by the Fall and who intend to get to their feet. Such doctrines I defined in violent, Nietzschean opposition to Christianity – something not inaccurate in historical terms (given, for instance, the dichotomy between Christianity and Mithraism[9] in Antiquity). My analysis, however, was far from being objective and uncontroversial. It certainly provided useful backing for those who wished to accuse the ancient Mystery tradition of possessing a Luciferian character – although some branches of the tradition certainly did promote the aforementioned theory of the two natures. Besides, a personal, inner embrace of initiatory doctrines in the spirit which I described would, generally, have led to the kind of catastrophic results which I previously mentioned. Nevertheless, despite the accessory, excessive and rhetorical aspects of the essay, my discussion of certain features of the 'Left-Hand Path' – a subject I more adequately treated later – was certainly valid. More generally, the essay presented a strong dramatisation of those essential ideas that I had already explored in the course of my philosophical enquiries.

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[8] The *Corpus Hermeticum* is an anthology of texts, believed to have been originally composed in Greece in the first three centuries AD (although some believe they originated in ancient Egypt), which was assembled by Marsilio Ficino and other Italian scholars during the Renaissance. The texts claim to communicate great occult wisdom, and are among the primary texts of the Western mystical tradition. Several translations have been rendered into English, the most recent being Brian P. Copenhaver's *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Evola's own book, *The Hermetic Tradition.*

In order to complete the retrospective account of the more problematic features of the works written in this period, I should mention *Pagan Imperialism* (*Imperialismo pagano*). This book pertains to a rather different domain from the one I have focused on so far: a domain influenced by political ideologies; hence, a few preliminary remarks are in order. I already mentioned the fact that none of the works that I composed in this period of my career can adequately be categorised: *Pagan Imperialism* was published when the 'Ur Group' ('Gruppo di Ur') was already active, but I still had to publish *Phenomenology*.

Around this time, I met a number of different people. One of these was Arturo Reghini, a curious and most interesting character. A few years older than myself, Reghini was a trueborn Florentine who had once been close to the *Lacerba* group. Reghini was apparently responsible for Papini's frivolous attempt (described in the autobiographical book *The Failure*[10]) to retire in a secluded place to 'become a god' by means of a condensed two-week initiation course. When I first met Reghini, he had reached the thirty-third degree of Scottish Rite Freemasonry, and had written an impressive volume on the sacred key words employed in the first degrees of the sect, on which subject he appeared to possess an uncommon knowledge. A mathematician and philologist, as well as a highly critical mind, Reghini was devoted to the study of initiation with a seriousness and objectiveness unknown to 'occultists' and Theosophists (which were ever the victims of the man's caustic sarcasm). It is thanks to my encounter with Reghini (and, soon after, with Guénon, who Reghini first mentioned to me) that I decidedly broke with what 'occultist' or Theosophical tendencies I still possessed, and came to acknowledge the complete separateness and transcendence of initiatory wisdom with respect to all profane culture, and particularly the modern (including philosophy).

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[9] Mithraism was an initiatory mystery religion, based to an uncertain extent on Zoroastrian beliefs, which was popular most especially in the ranks of the military of the Roman Empire. See Evola's own *The Path of Enlightenment According to the Mithraic Mysteries.*

[10] See note #13, p. 12.

Reghini was fond of the idea of a Western esoteric tradition (which might also be termed an 'Italic' tradition, given Reghini's often problematic references to Pythagorean doctrine[11]). Consequently, Reghini had sought to revive Masonic rites and symbols. Reghini also praised 'pagan' Roman culture, which he refused to interpret merely as a political and juridical reality set in a framework of cults and superstitious practices, as was common at the time. Rather, Reghini emphasised the sacred, if not initiatory character of many aspects of Roman culture, and on this basis argued in favour of Roman wisdom and of the Roman view of life and holiness – something he explicitly contrasted with Christianity. Given Reghini's approach, it is clear that his opposition to Christianity was of a very different kind from that of Nietzsche. Reghini argued that Christianity was an exotic belief founded on a dubious spirituality that appealed to the irrational, sub-intellectual and sentimental side of man. Christianity, in the eyes of Reghini, was a religion of the 'spiritual proletariat', both inseparable from Judaism and utterly foreign to the style, ideals, ethics and austere sacredness of Roman culture.

A similar approach to Christianity had already been favoured by other authors, and particularly by L. Rougier[12] in his notable introduction to the surviving fragments of Celsus' work against the Christians.[13] What was new in Reghini was his reference to the sacred wisdom and Mystery doctrines that could be accessed by means of a more profound study of Classical Antiquity. Reghini's analysis also contained a strong tendency towards the 'idealisation' of Roman culture, since Roman culture could not have yielded to Christianity, had it not already been undermined by the presence of cults, ideas and tendencies of an equally un-Roman and Asiatic nature.

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[11] Pythagoras, the Sixth century BC Greek philosopher who is most readily identified with mathematics, also founded his own school of religious thought, which has come to be known as Pythagoreanism. This doctrine emphasised the importance of mathematics for understanding the world, and also expounded the idea of the 'transmigration of souls', or reincarnation.

[12] Louis Rougier (1889-1982) was an important French philosopher of his day. Among other activities, he attacked the revival of Scholasticism within the Catholic Church. The work to which Evola is referring is *Celsus, or, the Conflict Between Antiquity and Primitive Christianity* (*Celse, ou, Le conflit de la civilisation antique et du christianisme primitif* [Paris: Éditions du Siècle, 1925]). No English translation exists.

To a large extent, I already shared the ideas of Reghini, although I still had to adequately develop them at the time. It is through my encounter with Reghini that, for the first time, I came to distance my theory of the Absolute Individual from the rarefied milieu of pure 'value', and to apply it to the history, traditions and philosophy of civilisation. In 'pagan' culture I found an ideal most congenial to the doctrine of the Absolute Individual, which, in *Pagan Imperialism*, I rather fancifully sought to apply to the contemporary cultural and political milieu.

So far, I had stayed clear of politics. I had little in common with all Italian political parties – and up to this day, I have yet to adhere to any party or even vote in an election. My first political piece of writing was born out of an encounter with Duke Giovanni Colonna di Cesarò,[14] with whom I was on friendly terms. Colonna di Cesarò had asked me to write a piece for his magazine, which, if I recall correctly, was entitled *The Democratic Idea (L'Idea democratic)*.[15] I then told the Duke that I would only write a refutation of democracy, a suggestion to which he agreed, arguing that, after all, similar concessions are the privilege of 'democratic liberty'.

The troubled waters of the post-war period had witnessed the birth of Fascism following the March on Rome and Mussolini's seizure of power. Naturally, I could only sympathise with those who fought Leftist forces and the democratic regime. Yet, what mattered to me were the values in the name of which this fight was waged. I already mentioned how, ever since my early youth, I had been contemptuous of nationalist infatuations. Additionally, the time I had spent serving in the so-called 'noble corps' of the artillery and cavalry during the First World War had made me biased towards those dubious human elements which then formed the ranks of the storm troopers, and now surfaced again among the 'Blackshirts'. The true revolution which ought to have taken place, I believed, was a 'revolution led from above': a revolution led by the sovereign, who ought not have allowed Mussolini to present himself as the spokesman of that 'Italy born at Vittorio Veneto',[16] but who ought to have assumed such a role personally and acted accordingly, in the attempt to reinforce the State and curb the tide of subversion.

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[13] Celsus was a Second century Greek philosopher who was one of the earliest opponents of Christianity, which he attacked in defence of the pagan view. The work Evola mentions is his sole surviving text, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[14] The Duke was an Anthroposophist, a representative of Social Democracy (a 1920s political group of southern Italian landowners), a member of the Fascist Party and later an anti-Fascist, and he was also the chairman of Pro Israele, an Italian Catholic organization which supported Jewish rights and Zionism. He later became part of the Ur Group, and Evola praised some of his later writings. Two of his works were translated: *Quadruple Diplomacy in the Balkans: Its Errors and its Remedies* (1916) and *The Adriatic Question*.

[15] Evola was indeed mistaken. The Duke's magazine was actually *The Democratic State (Lo Stato Democratico)*, according to Renato Del Ponte in his Preface to *Introduction to Magic*.

Aside from the socialist and proletarian origins of Mussolini, the republican and 'secular' bent of early Fascism is self-evident. The fusion of Fascism with nationalism served to rectify such tendencies, although it also limited the revolutionary character of Fascism by rendering it more bourgeois: Italian nationalism, after all, was merely the product of the middle class and of a flabby traditionalism of a conformist and pro-Catholic bent. A strong Right established on an aristocratic, monarchic and military basis, of the kind which had asserted itself in central Europe, was non-existent in Italy. Nevertheless, with Mussolini, Italy was spared a worse fate. By the time Mussolini had sought to embrace the ideal of the Roman state and of *imperium*, by the time he had planned to oppose those forces that had become predominant in Europe thanks to the disorder of the War, and to promote the new model of a disciplined, virile and pugnacious Italian, the most critical moment had passed.

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[16] The Battle of Vittorio Veneto was fought between 24 October and 3 November 1918. The Italian Army launched a massive offensive against the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which led to the defeat of the Austrian forces and their complete surrender, followed by the withdrawal of Austria-Hungary from the war. The Italians also managed to seize some Austrian territory which was considered properly Italian, such as South Tyrol, and which became permanently incorporated into Italy during the peace negotiations. Many Italian nationalists hailed this achievement as the natural conclusion of the Risorgimento (unification) which had begun in 1861, with the establishment of Italian independence from the Austrian Empire.

Pagan Imperialism was born of my exchange with Giuseppe Bottai.[17] H was the same age as me, and had served as an artillery officer in the same regi as me. He later became involved with the Futurist movement, which adhe Fascism in the aftermath of the War. Bottai was keen to be numbered amon 'intellectuals' of the Fascist movement, and was the chief editor of *Fascis (Critica Fascista)*, a magazine that enjoyed quite a margin of freedom of speech lowing my conversations with Bottai, I sought to 'get things moving' by laun a revolutionary programme that would discuss the Fascist view of life, inclu the issue of the compatibility of Fascism with Christianity. As Bottai was intri by the idea, I wrote a number of articles on the subject for his magazin when the human object of my critique became evident, once I had expressed idea of a 'pagan imperialism' as the only acceptable approach for Fascism Fascism to possess both courage and coherence – all hell broke loose. Given semi-official character of Bottai's magazine, the official newspaper of the Va (the *Roman Observer [Osservatore Romano]*) strongly criticised the fact that Fas might tolerate similar ideas. What followed was a barrage of attacks from the p and word of the scandal even reached ears abroad. No doubt, good reason isted for such an exaggerated reaction to my essays: the pact between Fascist I and the Catholic Church had not yet been signed at the time, and there were that someone might want to ruin the plan. Faced with such a disastrous spect Bottai displayed the same loyalty towards me which he was to prove again, at time of the crisis of Fascism: Bottai turned me down, and did not even allow to address the most absurd accusations formulated by the Guelph[18] press. Bo washed his hands of the whole matter, arguing that the articles in question, 'al indicative of the difficulties faced by Fascism' (?), merely reflected their auth opinion.

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[17] Giuseppe Bottai (1895-1959) helped Mussolini to found the Fasci italiani di com timento, the forerunner of the Fascist Party, in 1919, and he remained active as a Fascist until 1 serving as a legislator, Minister of Education, Mayor of Rome, and member of the Fascist G Council at various times, and initiated some anti-Semitic measures. In July 1943, however, he vote favour of removing Mussolini from office, and then fought in the French Foreign Legion. In 1 he returned to Italy and edited a political journal, *A.B.C.*, until his death.

[18] Guelph is a Thirteenth century term which was originally coined to name the suppo of Papal authority, who were struggling against the Ghibellines, who favoured the imperial p of the Hohenstaufen throne instead. Evola saw this conflict as highlighting the distinction betw priestly and royal authority in the state, since he believed the Ghibelline view to be the only valid from a traditional perspective. He discusses this at length in *Revolt Against the Modern World.*

I was then forced to take the matter into my own hands. In *Pagan Imperialism* (a book published in 1928), I reaffirmed and further developed those suggestions I had first made in my articles. I also addressed the various points raised by my detractors. The book, which is now out of print and hard to come by, was subtitled 'Fascism and the Euro-Christian Peril – With a Polemical Appendix on Guelph Reactions'. The preface to the book focused on the idea of an 'anti-Europe' – what I was later more aptly to define as a 'revolt against the modern world'. Here are a few sentences from the first pages of *Pagan Imperialism*:

'Contemporary Western "civilisation" awaits a radical upheaval, for without a similar upheaval, sooner or later, it is destined to collapse. Western civilisation is responsible for the utter perversion of all rational order. As the reign of matter, of gold, machinery and quantity, Western civilisation knows neither freedom nor light. The West has forgotten the meaning of terms such as order and obedience, contemplation and action, ideals, spiritual power and the divinity of man. The West no longer knows nature . . . nature has been reduced to a dull and fatal exteriority, the mystery of which profane science seeks to ignore by formulating petty laws and hypotheses. The West no longer knows Wisdom . . . the magnificent condition of those who have turned ideals into blood, life and power . . . The West has forgotten the meaning of the word "state": the meaning of the state as an ideal, of *imperium* as the synthesis of spirituality and regality . . . The West no longer knows war as something sought in itself, as a superior value and a path to spiritual self-realisation . . . The formidable "activists" of Europe have forgotten the meaning of war: they know no warriors, only soldiers . . . Europe has lost its simplicity, its centrality and its vitality. Democratic sickness is corroding the very roots of Europe: European jurisprudence, science, and thought. There are no more leaders: individuals who stand out not on account of violence, wealth or the ability to exploit slaves, but of their irreducible qualities. Europe is a broad, inured body that is dragged this way and that by obscure and unforeseeable forces that crush all those who seek to contrast or even escape such a process. This is the product of Western "civilisation". This is the acclaimed fruit of the superstition of "Progress" – something so distant from the Roman ideal of *imperium*, from Hellenic light, from the ancient East, from the vast Ocean. Each moment that passes the grip tightens on those few still capable of voicing their disgust and of choosing revolt.'

These words were followed by other considerations, and then by the question: 'Might Fascism represent the beginning of an anti-European restoration? Does Fascism today possess the strength to fulfil such a task?' In *Pagan Imperialism* I acknowledged the fact that 'Fascism is of lowly origins, having sprung from ill-defined needs and from the brute forces awakened by the European war.' I stated that Fascism 'has been feeding on compromises, and on the petty ambitions of petty individuals. The state which Fascism has established is frequently uncertain, awkward, violent, fettered and ambiguous' (it is worth noting here how similar words could freely be published in the allegedly 'oppressive' milieu of Fascist dictatorship). And yet, in my book, I also acknowledged that no other 'foundation and hope' could be found at present aside from Fascism. The question, then, was whether Fascism would ever fulfil the necessary tasks.

Admittedly, *Pagan Imperialism* combined a radical impulse, expressed in violent terms, with youthful excess, a lack of political sensibility and a utopian unawareness of present conditions. The various chapters of the book suggested ways in which Fascism might have accomplished the genuine revolution which was needed – and not merely in the political and social field, but in the overall outlook on life, the world, even the divine. In such a way I not only attacked all forms of democracy and egalitarianism – including what I perceived as the negative aspects of Fascism (notably: its nationalist, Mazzinian[19] and neo-Hegelian overtones); but I also outlined the values to embrace in opposition to modern economy, science, technology and 'Faustian' activism. I thus talked of castes, not without certain references to traditional or Eastern doctrines (rather inopportune and counter-productive references at that, given the cultural horizons of the public I sought to address).

The true drive of the book, however, consisted in its approach to religion – and the evident coherence of my thesis on religious matters elicited many worried reactions. The central question I addressed was the extent to such Fascist ethics might be regarded as compatible with Christian ethics. I asked whether Rome and its symbols could usefully be evoked without also evoking their inseparable counterpart: 'pagan' spirituality, something altogether different from Christianity. In my book, I unambiguously dismissed the Guelph identification of the Roman tradition with the Catholic, and denounced the idea of 'Catholic Romanness' as an act of usurpation. I then reaffirmed the chief points I had already drawn in my 'scandalous' articles in *Critica Fascista*. I wrote: 'The central premise is that the purest expression of Fascism ought to be an imperial will; that the Fascist evocation of the Eagle and Fasces ought not be a merely rhetorical operation, if Fascism is to represent a heroic rebirth rather than a laughable (*sic*) revolution.' Following this premise, I wrote: 'If Fascism coincides with an imperial will, it is only by reverting to the pagan tradition that it will be its genuine self: only thus will Fascism be able to embrace the spirit which it lacks at present, and which no Christian belief can ever provide.'

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[19] Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was a philosopher and Italian nationalist who led a number of failed insurrections intended both to gain Italian independence from the Austrian Empire, and to unify Italy. Even once Italy began to gain actual independence in the 1860s, however, Mazzini still voluntarily remained in exile due to his disagreement with the favoured idea that Italy should become a kingdom, since he preferred a republic (which finally did become a reality in 1946). Despite his failures, Mazzini has always been hailed as one of the founders of the modern Italian state.

Addressing one further question, I sought to defend the Ghibelline[20] position: 'Fascism faces the following dilemma: either to define the empire as a brutal material order – in which case it can tolerate the Church, granting it a primary position in the administration of the spiritual realm seen as something altogether foreign to the empire (which is then subject to the Church in spiritual matters); or it can conceive the empire, *in primis et ante omnia*,[21] as an immanent spiritual reality – in which case, Fascism must strip the Church of its power and submit it to the authority of the state, which will tolerate the Church to the same extent that it will temporarily tolerate other, similar international organisations.' This was the political side of the question. The other issue I discussed concerned the intrinsic and unavoidable antithesis between opposite values and worldviews. By way of Ghibelline and Roman thought, my interest was gradually shifting to what I later came to describe as the 'traditional' state: a state possessing both political power (*imperium*) and genuine spiritual authority.

The lack of such points of reference at the time of writing *Pagan Imperialism* and my emphasis on anti-Christian polemics represent the most significant limitation of my militant little book, and one which is already concealed in its title: for I ought to have employed neither the word 'imperialism' – a modern expression that describes a negative tendency most commonly associated with exaggerated nationalism – nor the word 'pagan' – a derogatory term used by Christians. Rather, in historical terms, I ought to have spoken of 'Roman traditionalism'. Equally problematic was my reference to an ill-defined 'Mediterranean tradition': an idea that I was soon radically to redefine or abandon.

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[20] See note #18, p. 82.

[21] Latin: 'first and foremost.'

From a political perspective, the appeal I launched with *Pagan Imperialism* was completely ignored. Mussolini never read the book – although someone might have fleetingly and tendentiously mentioned it to him.[22] *Pagan Imperialism* was intentionally buried in silence: the media being subject to strict control, the only reviews of the book or references to it appeared in lesser-known magazines and newspapers. Nevertheless, given that copies of *Pagan Imperialism* were indeed sold, it would not have been unreasonable to expect independent segments of Fascism to embrace its ideas. And yet, this never happened. Reghini himself was reserved on the matter, and did not view my attempt to develop some of his ideas in a favourable light, despite the fact that he had originally approved my literary endeavour.

On the other hand, the book did exert a certain influence abroad, and particularly in Germany. Here, *Pagan Imperialism* was regarded not as the work of a lone general without an army, but as the expression of a significant current within Fascism. I was personally believed to be the leader of this supposed current, which was conceived as being somewhat similar to those German movements that centred their political battles on the 'fight for a worldview' – something almost unheard of in Italy. In such a way, I became known abroad as the chief exponent of 'the Ghibelline approach to Fascism'. My renown further increased following the German translation of *Pagan Imperialism*, which was published in 1933 (by Armanen Verlag of Leipzig).

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[22] Perhaps unknown to Evola, Mussolini said this about the matter: 'Despite what is generally thought, I was not at all irritated by Doctor Julius Evola's pronouncements made a few months before the Conciliation on the modification of relations between the Holy See and Italy. Anyhow, Doctor Evola's attitude did not directly concern relations between Italy and the Holy See, but what seemed to him the long-term irreconcilability of the Roman tradition and the Catholic tradition. Since he identified Fascism with the Roman tradition, he had no choice but to reckon as its adversary any historical vision of a universalistic order.' Quoted in 'Julius Evola on Tradition and the Right' by E. Christian Kopff, available at *The Occidental Quarterly* Web site (www.theoccidentalquarterly.com/archives/vol2no2/eck-evola.html).

The German edition of the work contained much new and revised material, many of my ideas having been adapted to fit the German context (the translator emphasised the fact that the work 'formulated general suggestions, which might also find an application in the context of German culture'). In particular, I here defined the Ghibelline ideal by means of references to the Swabian tradition, and discussed the relation between the Roman and German civilisations (the three main areas of positive enquiry outlined by the editor of the book at the time were the Ghibelline ideal, genuine Nietzschean thought and the notion of hierarchy). In the German edition of *Pagan Imperialism,* I also focused on the symbolism of the 'anti-European' revolt in more detail: as a myth underlying this revolt, I mentioned the myth of the 'Two Eagles' (the Nordic eagle and the Roman one); as a practical point of reference, the Triple Alliance. It would be simplistic and incorrect, however, to argue that in my analysis I anticipated the ideal of the Axis: not merely because the German edition of *Pagan Imperialism* was published before the advent of Hitler, but because my plans in the book were of a very different nature from those of the Axis. At present, I have no wish to discuss the additional or revised material found in the German edition of *Pagan Imperialism,* for, in many ways, this material represents an anticipation and adaptation of the ideas I expressed in one of my chief works, a work which I began writing after 1930 and which was only published in 1934: *Revolt Against the Modern World* (*Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*). I will later come to discuss both these ideas and my own understanding of the Romano-Germanic myth.

THE 'UR GROUP'

The Italian edition of *Pagan Imperialism* was published at the time when the 'Ur Group' ('Gruppo di Ur') had already been formed, in early 1927. The term 'Ur' derived from the archaic root for 'fire'; as a prefix in German, it is also used to describe what is 'primordial' or 'original'. To talk of the Ur Group is to talk of esotericism. As the editor of *Atanòr* and *Ignis* (two journals published for a very brief period of time), Reghini had already sought to discuss esoteric and initiatory disciplines in a serious and rigorous manner by means of a critical engagement with genuine primary sources. The Ur Group followed the same path, but laid greater emphasis on practice and experimentalism. Under my guidance, the Group published a series of monthly booklets: monographs that were later bound together in volumes, aimed at a systematic and progressive treatment of the subject. All collaborators adopted pseudonyms, for we maintained that 'what matters is not the personality of the authors: what each author writes here reflects not his own personal ideas but a supra-personal and objective teaching.' There was no mention of my name in the collected edition of the monographs published in 1955 by Bocca under the title of *Introduction to Magic* (*Introduzione alla Magia*). Of the anonymous collaborators, some were well-known personalities; others had previously never written a thing, and had merely given their final approval to my own written exposition of their teachings. I should also mention the fact that some of the pseudonyms chosen were purely symbolic, and embodied the doctrinal tendencies that their authors sought to present. Both for the sake of the unity and completeness of the work, and for reasons of literary style, I personally contributed to quite a few of these monographs.

Once again, the introduction to these works emphasised the existential problem of the 'I': the existential crisis faced by those who no longer have faith in contemporary values and in what, both intellectually, practically and personally, is conventionally seen as bestowing a meaning on human existence. A further premise to these works was the assumption that when faced with such a crisis, an individual ought neither to resort to palliatives nor back down; that an individual ought rather face the inevitable crisis with a firm resolve to 'dispel the mist and open a new path' by gaining 'knowledge of oneself and, within oneself, of Being'. *Introduction to Magic* described self-knowledge as a form of transcendental knowledge requiring a 'change in one's personal condition' and an absolutely positive kind of realisation. The *opus transformationis* or 'change of one's most inner nature is all that counts towards higher knowledge'. The introduction to the monographs suggested that a *science* devoted to this *opus* already existed: 'an exact, rigorous, methodical science which has been handed down in unbroken chains concealed from profane eyes; a science which is not concerned with external phenomena, but which rather focuses on the deepest forces of human interiority and proceeds in an experimental manner, employing the same objective and impersonal criteria as those of exact sciences.' This science, we argued, is connected to 'a single tradition which can be found, under various guises, amongst all peoples, in the form of either that wisdom possessed by regal and priestly elites, or of that knowledge concealed behind sacred symbols, myths, rites, Mysteries and initiations, the origins of which lie in the primordial past.'

As I already mentioned, seventeen years later the various monographs published by the Ur Group were printed in the form of a single volume entitled *Introduction to Magic* (subtitled 'A Science of the "I"'). The term 'magic', we were keen to emphasise in our introduction, is here to be taken figuratively: for it reflects neither the popular understanding of the word, nor that which was prevalent in Antiquity. 'Magic', in the monographs, was not understood as a series of real or merely superstitious practices aimed at producing extra-normal phenomena; rather, the term was used to suggest that our Group was chiefly focusing on that aspect of initiatory wisdom which is based on an active, sovereign and dominant approach to spiritual matters (I will later come to consider the historical implications of this approach).

The monographs published by the Ur Group, therefore, were primarily aimed at providing the reader with a taste of the aforementioned science. This aim was to be achieved by 'outlining methods, disciplines, and techniques', and by an in-depth analysis of symbolism; by means of 'a description of genuine experiences', and 'the republication or translation of rare or little-known texts and extracts, both Eastern and Western, elucidated and commented'. (The various texts we republished included the first Italian translation of the Greek *Mithras Liturgy* from the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris, a few chapters from one of the *Tantras*, Hermetic texts like the *Turba Philosophorum*, a few songs of Milarepa, the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, passages of the Buddhist *Milindapahña*, as well as extracts from Meyrink,[1] Kremmerz[2] and Crowley.[3])[4] Finally, the monographs were aimed at providing 'synthetic doctrinal outlines' and a critical investigation of the subject matter. The reader was to be presented with the different teachings of various esoteric schools, which he was free to choose from on the basis of his personal inclinations.

The Ur Group monographs were published in the course of three years, from 1927 to 1929. In the subsequent editions of the monographs – the first published by Bocca, the second by Edizioni Mediterranee – the material, now collected in three volumes of over 400 pages each, was revised and increased. While the new editions did not include those monographs which had by then been turned into separate books, they did include new monographs for the sake of completeness. Overall, *Introduction to Magic* can well be described as a unique work, not least because its treatment of the subject is so remote from the digressing, superficial style most commonly employed by secret societies and sects. I believe that *Introduction* will continue to serve as an important source in the future for those interested in certain disciplines.

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[1] Gustav Meyrink (1868-1932) was an Austrian Buddhist and writer whose fiction has a mystical character. Many scholars of mysticism credit him with conveying genuine spiritual insights, despite the fictional trappings of his work.

[2] Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-1930) was an Italian alchemist who, in 1896, founded the Confraternita Terapeutica e Magica di Myriam (Therapeutic and Magic Brotherhood of Myriam), which still exists under a different name today. Kremmerz claimed to have been initiated into an ancient Italian hermetic tradition which predated Christianity, and had remained underground ever since (although occasionally manifesting itself through the works of supposed initiates such as Dante). Kremmerz adopted these techniques as the teachings of his Myriam school. His principle idea was 'sacred materialism', which was the belief that matter and spirit are not separate. The goal of his initiates is to bring about the integration of the two elements.

[3] Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was an English occultist who promulgated an occult philosophy of life known as Thelema. He was and remains one of the most influential modern occultists.

[4] Nearly all of the texts mentioned here are available among the English selections published by Inner Traditions as *Introduction to Magic*.

Unfortunately, towards the end of its second year, the Ur Group underwent a split. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but have largely to do with the fact that certain people sought to transfer editorial control over the monographs from my hands into those of individuals directly involved in Freemasonry – despite the official suppression of Freemasonry by the Fascist authorities (these people admitted their involvement with Freemasonry at a later date, when such a confession was no longer politically dangerous).[5] As this attempt to strip me of editorial control proved unsuccessful, the same individuals sought to prevent the publication of the monographs altogether – again, with little success. The only consequence of their endeavour was the departure of one of our most apt (albeit not most frequent) collaborators, who, as it turned out, was personally and obscurely connected to one of these dubious characters.

Naturally, it would be impossible for me to adequately describe the vast and varied content of the three volumes of *Introduction to Magic*. Besides, this would be a pointless operation, as this book is not my work alone. However, I might mention how one of the monographs, from an initiatory perspective, demolished the psychoanalytical approach which Jung had adopted 'to scientifically valorise' ancient traditional doctrines, and to interpret their symbolism by means of confused talk about 'the collective unconscious', 'archetypes', and 'the process of individuation'. To provide an idea of the heterogeneous character of *Introduction*, I might also mention the following contents: an outline of the initiatory theory of knowledge as pure experimentalism; the first part of a well-documented investigation into the initiatory aspects of the Roman tradition; a discussion of Guènon's notion of 'initiatory continuity' and of the relation between contemplation and action; an analysis of the limits of Christian mysticism; and a number of remarks concerning ethnology. Most writings contained in *Introduction*, it should also be noted, deal not with doctrinal matters but with specific methods and practices, and seek to elucidate various forms of symbolism (particularly that of a Hermetic kind).

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[5] According to Renato Del Ponte, in his Preface to *Introduction to Magic*, these 'certain people' were Arturo Reghini and Giulio Parise. This schism occurred in October 1928.

The Ur Group monographs particularly sought to emphasise the initiatory doctrine of 'conditioned immortality', an issue I had already discussed in one of my *Essays on Magical Idealism*. *Introduction to Magic* criticised the notion that each individual is naturally endowed with a soul that is by rights 'immortal', stating that that this represents an illusion typical of exotericism ('external knowledge') and alien to higher, esoteric wisdom. Esotericism, by contrast, is seen here as being characterised by a distinction between mere survival and true immortality, and by a rejection of the alternative between the punishment of the 'immortal soul' and its reward in the afterlife on moral grounds; esotericism rather envisages an alternative between survival in a godly form and complete non-survival, or survival in a temporary, larval form – where the former possibility is determined by initiation or by a similar process aimed at annulling the conditioning of the (ordinarily limited and perishable) sense of the wholeness of the 'I' by the body and sense perception. The antithesis between exoteric teaching and traditional, esoteric doctrine was here described as particularly relevant in the light of the 'spiritualist' beliefs marked by the kind of faith-based, optimistic and democratic unrealism which had come to prevail with the advent of Christianity; the opposite approach – that of conditioned immortality – was traced back to the pagan ideal of an exceptional and privileged Olympian immortality. Similar suggestions I later developed in my book *The Hermetic Tradition* (*La tradizione ermetica*) and in my new introduction to the *Tao-té-ching* (esoteric Taoism embodying a classic formulation of the doctrine of conditioned immortality, which it conceives as something to be 'developed').

At first sight, the doctrine of conditioned immortality, founded as it is on the notion of a mortal 'I' conditioned by the body, appears to stand in contrast with that of the 'Absolute Individual'. The two doctrines, however, are only apparently incompatible with one another: for, to assign the 'I' of the 'Absolute Individual' to each and every person would be even more absurd than to invest each person – as 'spiritualists' do – with a naturally immortal soul. Rather, the initiatory approach is fully compatible with the theory of the two opposite paths outlined in my book *Theory* – the condition of the 'mortal soul' being identical to that of the 'path of the other' or 'path of the object'. The advantage of my treatment of this subject in *Introduction* *to Magic* lies in my reference in the book to concrete traditions and operative tasks. The world of the 'mortal soul' is identical to what the Indians have termed the world of *samsāra,* and the Chinese the current of transformation: the world where one merely passes from one conditioned and contingent mode of existence to another, with no real sense of continuity. In Hindu terms, this world is also known as the 'path of the forefathers', a path opposed to that 'of the gods'. In *Introduction to Magic,* the latter path is explored in an absolutely realist framework which is very different from the speculative framework of *Phenomenology. Introduction* suggests that, in order to progress towards the 'Self', it is necessary to know the 'I' in the same crude terms adopted by materialism and positivism (here, too, lies the true significance of the Buddhist doctrine which denies the existence of an 'I'). Once and for all, I here established the fact that initiatory work (the *opus transformationis*), by its very nature, is as independent of morality, sentimental drives, and 'cultural values' as positive, technical science. Naturally, a similar approach shocked Theosophists and neo-spiritualists, who accused our Group of immorality and 'black magic'.

From its second volume, *Introduction to Magic* also engages with the issue of 'Tradition' and traditional forms. I will discuss the matter later on, when describing my personal contribution and re-evaluation of the views of Bachofen,[6] Wirth[7] and Guénon. As for the Ur Group, it sought to establish a 'chain' by means of group practices. The criteria the Group adopted, and the corresponding operative instructions, were outlined in two monographs in *Introduction.* At least two of the members of this operative nucleus possessed genuine powers. As for the aims of the Group, its chief goal was to awaken a higher force which might aid the personal work of each individual member. As a psychic body, the Group also pursued a more ambitious goal: that of evoking a power from on high. Had the Group succeeded in this goal, it might even have been able to secretly influence the forces generally prevailing at the time. The direction this influence might have taken would roughly have corresponded to the one outlined in *Pagan Imperialism* and embodied by the 'Roman' ideals of Reghini.

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[6] Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887) was a Swiss anthropologist who asserted in his book, *Mutterrecht* (translated into English in the volume *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]), that lunar matriarchy was the primordial condition of human society, and that solar patriarchy emerged later in opposition to it. Evola hailed Bachofen as a traditionalist and discussed him frequently in his own writings, particularly in 'Matriarchy in J.J. Bachofen's Work', available at *Evola As He Is* (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id22.html).

[7] Herman Wirth (1885-1981) was a Dutch German who believed that there was an ancient, worldwide Nordic culture which has been forgotten apart from some traces which remain encoded in ancient myths and symbols. Like Evola, he was briefly involved with the SS Ahnenerbe in the 1930s. None of his works have been translated, although Joscelyn Godwin has published two excellent articles on Wirth, 'Out of Arctica? Herman Wirth's Theory of Human Origins', in *Rûna* 5 (1999); and 'Herman Wirth on Folksong', in *Tyr* 2 (2004).

Yet such goals were never accomplished (for the sake of honesty, I should point out that some of the phenomena pertaining to the Group which are described in *Introduction* are best approached with a certain degree of reservation). The operative nucleus was disbanded in the second year of the Group's existence, partly on account of the aforementioned schism that had taken place. Having failed to accomplish its goals, the Group abandoned the idea of exercising any influence on the external world; besides, I was personally doubtful as to the possibilities of collective operative work in general. It might be interesting to note, however, that at one stage, Mussolini came to believe that someone was seeking to influence him by magical means.

This happened at a later date – in 1930 or 1931, if I am not mistaken. At that time, a number of papers which regularly published articles of mine were suddenly given the order to turn down my work. I have never been able to ascertain the reasons behind this resolution. In the pages of *Introduction*, we had criticised those people who challenged us to prove the effectiveness of supernatural powers, not by means of extraordinary feats such as hurling the Himalayas into the Pacific Ocean, but through 'irrelevant' actions like raising a paper knife a few centimetres above a desk. In *Introduction,* we addressed such challenges by stating that in purely physical terms, the power necessary to perform a similar task would certainly be greater than the power required to shift a few molecules or fibres inside a human brain in such a way as to cause a cerebral haemorrhage, or even somebody's death. We argued that if such a power 'objectively' existed, then any brain might serve equally well as a potential target – including the brain of a 'head of state'. By this argument we sought to prove that the apparently 'irrelevant' display of power asked of us as 'proof' might, in fact, have extraordinary consequences on an entire nation, were it to be exercised freely, and not in the unconscious, unintentional and sporadic manner in which it is exercised by mediums and all other such people.

Apparently, someone tendentiously presented our argument to Mussolini, while implying that with the expression 'head of state' it was precisely him that we had in mind. The Duce, who had probably heard some gossip concerning our operative chain (which was already defunct by then), came to suspect that certain individuals were planning to exercise a magical influence upon him. Once he ascertained the reality of the facts, Mussolini no longer interfered. In truth, Mussolini was not only an easily suggestible character, but also a rather superstitious one (something hardly surprising given the man's mentality, which was foreign to all genuine spirituality). The Duce, for example, was genuinely scared of 'jinxes', whose very name he forbade to be uttered in his presence.

MY EXPLORATION OF ORIGINS AND TRADITION

It is now time for me to discuss how, at the time of the Ur Group, I gradually came to extend my field of interest, and became acquainted with new ways of thinking. I will here emphasise how I was influenced by the ideas of J.J. Bachofen, R. Guénon, H. Wirth and Guido De Giorgio in particular.

I already mentioned the fact that it was Reghini who first mentioned the works of Guénon to me. My initial reaction to this unequalled master of our time was rather negative, both because my 'personal equation' was so different from that of Guénon – whose character was essentially 'intellectual' (it is not by chance that Guénon has been dubbed the Descartes of esotericism) – and because I was still influenced at the time by Idealist and Nietzschean views, which I combined with a Tantric perspective. I was even to criticise Guénon's book on *Vedānta* in writing (in the magazine *Realistic Idealism [Idealismo realistico]*). Guénon addressed my criticism, but, evidently, the two of us were speaking a different language. Only gradually did I come to appreciate the value of Guénon's work, which allowed me to more adequately put my own ideas into focus.

First and foremost, Guénon was engaged in a serious and detailed analysis of what he termed 'traditional sciences', as well as in an exposition of myth and symbolism that took account of supra-rational and 'intellectual' elements – in such a way as to distinguish itself from both the so-called comparative study of religion, and from the kind of study once pursued by Romantics and pursued today by psychoanalysts and irrationalists. Guénon was always keen to emphasise the 'non-human' character of such wisdom: this is what helped me to distance myself from profane culture once and for all, and to recognise the futility of any attempt to establish some sort of foundation and point of reference for 'modern thought'.

Guénon produced a stringent critique of modern civilisation; yet unlike other contemporary authors, both famous and unknown, Guénon based his critique of modernity on a positive counterpart: the world of Tradition, which, from a more elevated perspective, he conceived as the normal world. Compared to the world of Tradition, the modern world appeared as an anomalous and regressive civilisation, born of a deep crisis and deviance within humanity. Tradition: this was the basic issue destined to bring my worldview to completion. Guénon used this term in a specific way. Firstly, Guénon only employed the word 'Tradition' in the singular, to refer to the Primordial Tradition from which all specific, historic and pre-modern traditions had derived as reflections and individual forms, adaptations and expressions. Secondly, Tradition, for Guénon, had nothing to do with conformism or routine: Tradition being rather the fundamental structure behind all organic, differentiated and hierarchical civilisations – civilisations in which all spheres of influence and human activities are ordained from above and directed towards it. The natural centre of such a system is a transcendent influence, an order of principles, which in each traditional civilisation is embodied by an elite or leader possessing an authority that is unconditioned, legitimate and impersonal.

It is on the basis of this doctrine that my theory of the Absolute Individual underwent a 'mutation': a shift that might appear paradoxical from an external point of view. How could the Absolute Individual – the lawless destroyer of all bonds – be reconciled with the idea of Tradition? As I already partly suggested, the process that I now envisaged was a descent of the Absolute Individual from its solitary, abstract and rarefied heights to the concreteness of historical reality – a descent which implied a transfer of the notion of power. As E. Dodsworth[1] (a commentator of English ancestry) observed, the Absolute Individual found a perceptible form, almost an embodiment, in those characters situated at the centre of 'traditional' civilisations, individuals who acted as the axis and absolute legislators of their civilisations. This is the case, for instance, with the sacred or 'divine' (i.e., not merely human) kings attested to in the mythical cycles of ancient civilisations: for the figure of the sacred king embodies both transcendence and immanence (in Far Eastern terms, he is the 'real' or 'transcendent man', the middle power between Heaven and Earth'). What mattered the most to me was to draw light on this transition from what, in exasperatedly individualist terms, is 'supra-human' to what is 'non-human'; i.e., to the plane of a superior impersonality related to the genuine possession of a transcendent personality, and of a role bestowed from above. What I had anticipated in a confused manner in the polemical, violent pages of *Pagan Imperialism*, I now elucidated and vested with greater authority. This process disclosed a wide new horizon to my eyes, a horizon which had nothing to do with philosophical speculation.

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[1] Edmund Dodsworth was someone who was published by Evola in his 'Diorama filosofico' section of *Regime Fascista*. I can find no other information about him, although Dr. H.T. Hansen, in his introduction to the Inner Traditions edition of *Men Among the Ruins*, mentions him in passing as having been a monarchist.

Before turning to discuss my own understanding of Tradition (as opposed to that of other writers), I should mention the figure of Guido De Giorgio. His name is only familiar to a few friends; nor, I believe, will many traces survive of De Giorgio's work in terms of written material.[2] De Giorgio was a sort of initiate at a wild, chaotic level. He had lived among the Arabs and had personally met Guénon, who held De Giorgio in great esteem. De Giorgio was exceptionally learned and knew many languages. His character, however, was rather unstable – or subject to manic-depressive episodes, as a psychologist might say – and pervaded by passionate, emotive and lyrical drives reminiscent of Nietzsche's temperament. De Giorgio's dissatisfaction with the modern world was such that the man withdrew first to the mountains, which he perceived as his natural environment, and later to an abandoned rectory, where he lived on almost nothing, giving a few private lessons, and suffering whenever he was forced to resume contact with civilised city life. Yet, De Giorgio's existence was not of the calm, contemplative sort: for he had riddled his own life – including his own private and love life – with tensions, unbalances, and disorders of all kinds. One of the sons of De Giorgio, who had been raised to embrace the ideals of absolute action, died a hero's death in the Abyssinian War and was awarded a golden medal of honour. De Giorgio passed away in 1959, in the mountains he loved. The man exercised an influence on me not by way of books – for he never published any – but through his letters: outraged and aggressive letters, strewn with brilliant insights – but also with much confusion. De Giorgio dramatised and energised the idea of Tradition, which Guénon, in conformity to his own personal equation, presented in exceedingly formal and intellectual terms. To this, De Giorgio added a personal tendency towards absolutist positions which proved most congenial to my own character. Unfortunately, I believe that the few things written by De Giorgio which I personally published or commissioned someone to publish – including extracts of De Giorgio's letters, which were published against his will – are the only writings of the man to survive. I was particularly in contact with De Giorgio (whom I also met twice in the Alps) for the brief period when I worked at my own magazine, *The Tower [La Torre]* (which I will discuss later). What contributed to distance me from De Giorgio in more recent times was his embrace of an almost 'Vedantist' form of Christianity.

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[2] Several volumes of Guido De Giorgio's writings were published after Evola wrote this. None have been translated.

The idea of a Nordic, Hyperborean origin of the Primordial Tradition was part of the inner doctrines which Guénon promoted. In 1928, in Germany, the Dutch scholar Herman Wirth published his book *The Dawn of Humanity* (*Der Aufgang der Menschheit*), which further explored the notion of a Nordic origin of Tradition. The book was supposedly 'scientific' in its approach: Wirth showed no awareness of the esoteric sources known to scholars like Guénon, but discussed the idea of a primeval Nordic-Atlantic tradition originating in the remote past exclusively by external means of enquiry – ranging from philology to mythology and ethnology. Wirth sought both to trace the expansion of this original tradition following the great prehistoric migrations, and to define the various phases through which primordial symbolism had passed as it approached historical times. The scientific foundation of Wirth's muddled endeavour was rather dubious. While Wirth's book contained a great deal of confusion and many digressions, it proved useful to me in my attempt to broaden my own cultural horizons. Wirth's work suggested the need for a study of history that might explore the idea of Primordial Tradition without any allegedly scientific buttress – something which appeared more detrimental than useful.

Not long after, I became acquainted with the thought of J.J. Bachofen. The works of this nineteenth-century Swiss scholar explored the legal systems, symbols, and cults of ancient traditions, and had been made the object of renewed interest thanks to a partial republication of his studies at the hands of Bernouilli[3] and Bäumler.[4] Not unlike Wirth, Bachofen engaged with the issue of human origins, although he focused exclusively on the Mediterranean world, and did not look as far back as Hyperborean or Nordic-Atlantic prehistory. To some extent, Bachofen also made use of the historical category of 'Tradition', for he described civilisations and societies which were all founded on a central idea or worldview sustaining all aspects of human life. As a means to define such a centre, Bachofen acknowledged the importance of myths, symbols and sagas, which he regarded not as fantasies or arbitrary creations, but as expressions of a deeper and more basic reality: as the inner dimension of history and civilisation. The other notable contribution of Bachofen consists in his idea of the differentiated morphology of ancient civilisations. Bachofen defined two basic forms of civilisation: the Urano-virile civilisation, and the telluric (or lunar) and feminine one. In the former kind of civilisation, the highest principle of the universe is embodied by the celestial and luminous element personified by male divinities; in the latter, it is embodied by the principle of life and fecundity personified by the Great Goddess – by the Magna Mater,[5] or by similar divinities of a feminine, telluric, nocturnal or lunar character. Each of these two basic notions, according to Bachofen, informs all aspects of the civilisation by which it is embraced. In particular, Bachofen suggested that the opposition between these two basic principles historically led to an opposition between the 'heroic' civilisation and the 'Demetric' (or 'gynecocratic'); between Olympian, solar cults and chthonic, lunar cults; between patriarchy and matriarchy; between the aristocratic ethics founded on difference, and pantheistic, orgiastic promiscuity. According to Bachofen, various intermediate or mixed stages can also be found.

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[3] Carl Albrecht Bernoulli was a scholar who wrote not only on Bachofen, but also many books on myth, religion, and philosophy. He was also acquainted with Nietzsche's former friend, Franz Overbeck, and wrote several volumes on Nietzsche. None of his works have been translated.

[4] Alfred Bäumler (1887-1968) was a German philosopher who became most notorious for writing books on various philosophers, and Nietzsche in particular, which attempted to place their ideas within the context of supporting National Socialism. Thomas Mann dismissed Bäumler's work as 'Hitler prophecy', although Martin Heidegger continued to defend the validity of his views on Nietzsche even after 1945. None of his works have been translated.

[5] The Magna Mater, or 'Great Mother', was the ancient Roman name for Cybele, a Phrygian goddess identified with the fertile Earth. According to Livy, the Romans added the Magna Mater to their own pantheon after being advised in prophecies that doing so would bring them victory in the Second Punic War.

Besides gathering copious evidence for the contrast between the two opposite worldviews in the fields of ancient religion, mythology, sociology and law, Bachofen studied the conflict, both manifest and concealed, between the two types of civilisation. A notable example of this work is Bachofen's description of the rise of ancient Rome in terms of the progressive superimposition of a virile civilisation upon a pre-existent substrate oriented in the opposite direction.

I personally translated a number of extracts from Bachofen's writing, in such a way as to provide an overview of his most important ideas. A 250-page book containing such extracts, as well as an introduction and commentary, I composed before the war; however, it was only published by Bocca in 1949, under the title of *Mothers and Olympian Virility: Studies in the Secret History of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (*Le Madri e la virilità olimpica: Studi sulla storia segreta dell'antico mondo mediterraneo*). I will return to this book later on. I was the first in Italy to elicit the same kind of interest in Bachofen which had newly awakened among the Germans and Swiss. And yet, my book was largely ignored – which is once again indicative of the unresponsiveness of mainstream Italian culture with regard to similar ideas.

The different approaches adopted by the authors I have just described allowed me to apply my theory of the 'two paths' to a new field: the grandiose field of myth and history. I soon sought to combine the ideas of Guénon, Wirth and Bachofen, while rejecting the latter's evolutionism – for Bachofen had favoured the notion of a progressive evolution of humanity from primordial promiscuity, through the Demetric civilisation of the Mothers and of the Divine Feminine, to the heroic, patriarchal civilisation of Uranian, heroic myths; the culmination of this process, Bachofen had argued, was modern society (conceived as the 'rebirth of the West' in opposition to 'Asia'). By contrast, I pointed to the necessity of adopting a more dynamic approach by relating each supposed stage in the evolution of humanity to the influence of one among many different peoples reacting against one another. I was also personally aware of the need to oppose the most recent developments (the most recent 'stage') of the Urano-patriarchal, virile civilisation.

In truth, this civilisation, whether directly or indirectly, can be seen as being always connected to the primordial Hyperborean tradition; hence, it is possible to speak of its most recent character only in a relative, local sense, in those cases where it has come to affirm itself, following human migrations, in areas which were previously under the influence of an opposite worldview: a worldview characteristic of different peoples with different forms of spirituality. As regards Primordial Tradition, I was to adopt an opposite perspective from that of Bachofen: a devolutionary perspective, of the kind favoured by Guénon's sources. I observed that history as we know it is marked by a kind of descent and alteration, which has chiefly manifested itself in the dissociation of spiritual authority from the regal – the two forms of authority having originally been indissolubly united.

The devolution of humanity is one further issue with regard to which I developed a personal synthesis. I generally described devolution in terms of the contrast between a non-virile (i.e., 'non-regal' and 'non-central') spirituality, and what continued to exist as a form of virility lacking any direct contact with the sphere of the sacred and of spirituality. The former element corresponds to 'priesthood', which, at a lower level, takes on devotional aspects and is defined by non-central forms of sacredness (a 'lunar' kind of spirituality); the latter, virile element, were it to retain or newly awaken part of its primeval heritage, would be seen to possess the affirmative and 'central' (i.e., 'solar', 'Olympian', or even 'magical') character reflective of its primordial function. One might even describe these two elements in terms of the dichotomy between contemplation and action, and talk of two different kinds of sacredness and even of initiation: one of a warrior and regal kind, the other priestly.

It is in this wider context, then, that I chose to make use of Bachofen's morphology of civilisation. While I identified Uranian and heroic civilisations as expressions of the primordial Hyperborean tradition – as the Primordial Tradition in its 'regal' form – I defined the opposite civilisation – the lunar, chthonic civilisation of the Great Mother – as a source of change leading to regressive, intermediate phases, not least through the influence of external ethnic forces: that folk substrate which the Nordic-Atlantic people had first encountered in the course of its migrations.

In such a way, I turned Bachofen's evolutionary plan on its head, while at the same time altering Guénon's scheme (an endeavour which, incidentally, also contributed to reveal the differences between our two 'personal equations'). Guénon certainly acknowledged the fact that the manifestation of kingship and priesthood as two separate or even opposite poles was a relatively recent development in the history of humanity. Yet, Guénon argued in favour of the legitimate pre-eminence, in the present age, of priesthood (here associated with 'contemplation' and 'knowledge') over kingship and the warrior caste of the *kshatriya* (associated with action). By contrast, I argued that both poles being the product of a recent dissociation, one cannot be regarded as possessing greater dignity than the other: for both poles, I suggested, are equally remote from primordial unity. I also suggested that an orientation towards sovereignty might provide a better foundation for any attempt to reintegrate that condition of centrality (i.e., the condition of the Absolute Individual) which Guénon himself had described as the primordial condition of humanity. To describe the achievement of this reintegration 'by means of action' (i.e., on the basis of a warrior, vital disposition), I used the term 'heroic' (in the sense in which it was used by Hesiod[6]).

This, then, is the general framework in which I subsequently articulated my approach to the history of civilisation. The concrete relevance of this approach is self-evident: for the West – despite Christianity – mostly developed in terms of action. In his critique of the modern Western world, Guénon could hardly prove impartial, given his own personal inclinations. With regard to both the 'traditional' aspects of the Western world in the past and to the prospect of a possible rectification of the contemporary Western world, Guénon emphasised the ideals and notions of the priestly tradition of contemplation and 'knowledge', which had always been characteristic of the East, and particularly of Brahmanic[7] India (itself merely one aspect of Indian civilisation). By contrast, my own perspective allowed me to point out that, until very recently, the whole Far East has been permeated by a very different tradition, in which sacred imperial sovereignty was never subordinate to priesthood. My approach allowed for an alternative analysis, one more congenial to Western tradition.

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[6] Hesiod (approx. 7th century BC) was an early Greek poet. His most famous work, the *Works and Days*, outlines the cyclical Five Ages of Man, beginning with the utopian Golden Age and ending in the apocalyptic Iron Age. The Fourth Age is the Age of Heroes, which Hesiod identified with the heroes described by Homer.

[7] In Hinduism, the *brāhmana* occupy the highest of the four *Varnas* (castes) of the *Varnāśrama-dharma* (caste system), and are identified with contemplation, education, scholarship or the priesthood.

I first began to discuss the abovementioned in some of the monographs which the Ur Group published in its final year – monographs which were later reprinted in a revised edition – in order to provide a general framework for the group's work. In an essay entitled 'The Birth of the West', I developed a 'myth' for the re-evaluation of Roman civilisation. But all this was only a taste of what was to come in the future. It is in my subsequent book, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (*Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*), published in 1934, that I came to more adequately discuss the morphology and history of civilisation that I just outlined.

My Experience with *La Torre* and Its Implications

Before progressing any further, I should mention my engagement with *La Torre.* My publication of this magazine was yet another attempt, on my part, to enter the political and cultural arena. Having abandoned the extremist and heedless positions of *Pagan Imperialism*, I now sought to refer to the idea of 'Tradition' and of 'traditional civilisation', and to ascertain to what extent it might be possible to influence the Italian milieu in this regard beyond the narrow field of specialist studies. In 1930, when the Ur Group had ceased its publications (having discussed what needed to be discussed), I founded the magazine *La Torre,* which was issued once a fortnight and subtitled 'A Paper of Many Approaches to the One Tradition' ('Foglio di espressioni varie e di tradizione unica'). Guido De Giorgio was one of the people who inspired me to publish *La Torre.* I also had a rather multifarious team of collaborators at my disposal, which included (among others): Gino Ferretti, Girolamo Comi,[1] Emilio Servadio,[2] Leonardo Grassi and Roberto Pavese.[3] The editorial of the first issue stated that the magazine sought to gather the few people capable of a revolt against contemporary civilisation; it read: 'Our paradigm, on all levels, is the sovereign right of ascetic, heroic and aristocratic privilege, as opposed to all that which is practical, conditioned and temporal, and which is in any way driven by passion or utility – whether individual or collective. Our paradigm is the firm protest against the insolent omnipresence of economic and social tyranny, against the collapse of all higher points of reference into what is most basely human.' 'Philosophy, art, politics, science, even religion' were here stripped of any right and possibility to exist merely in themselves, and to be of any relevance outside a higher framework.

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[1] Girolamo Comi (1890-1968) was an Italian poet and Anthroposophist who converted to Christianity, inspiring an oft-quoted 1935 letter from Evola in which he said that the 'conversion that really matters' is one's inward orientation toward Tradition. His works have not been translated.

[2] Emilio Servadio (1904-1995) was an Italian psychoanalyst who was interested in parapsychology, and he became well-known in both fields. In 1937, he co-founded the Societa Italiana Di Parapsychologia (Italian Society for Parapsychology), which still exists today. In the 1960s, he did ESP research using LSD and psilocybin. Several of his later books are available in English.

[3] Roberto Pavese wrote several books on philosophy and parapsychology. None have been translated.

This higher framework coincided with the very idea of Tradition, which elicited the need 'for a light to shine forth in all fields, a light that might once more reflect the meaning of existence, of life and death, and which might raise all values, both natural and supra-natural, to a new level of heroic synthesis and freedom'. To the best of our abilities, by avoiding all compromises, we sought to promote the aforementioned values in various fields and in a variety of ways (including by poetic and literary means) which, however varied, would nevertheless reflect a single ideal. *La Torre* stood as the self-proclaimed symbol 'not of shelter or of some kind of mystical escapism, but of resistance, combat and a superior sense of reality'.

Again, in the very first issue of the magazine, in a short article entitled 'Identity Card', I discussed our approach to politics and Fascism. The purpose of our magazine, I then argued, 'is to defend ideals unaffected by any political regime – be it Fascist, Communist, anarchist or democratic. These ideals transcend the political sphere; yet, when translated on the political level, they necessarily lead to qualitative differences – which is to say: to hierarchy, authority and *imperium* in the broader sense of the word' as opposed to 'all forms of democratic and egalitarian turmoil'. I then emphasised that: 'To the extent to which Fascism embraces and defends such ideals, we shall call ourselves Fascists. And this is all.' In the article, I also noted how such an approach was exactly the opposite of that which was most common at the time, which consisted in adhering to the Fascist regime and Party *a priori,* and in conforming to either condemn or defend given ideas on the sole basis of contingent political necessity. Ultimately, our own approach questioned the primacy of politics over ideals, and the subordination of the latter to the former. On the contrary, we maintained that politics were to be subordinated to ideals, 'unless politics is to become a base, empirical and contingent matter'. In our analysis, we also questioned another aspect of contemporary political reality: the belief that Fascist identity merely served as 'a badge of mediocrity allowing each person openly to profess the most peculiar and varied opinions'. Rather, we argued that genuine ideals – those of Tradition – were to be placed at the forefront; and that it was only on the basis of such ideals that a political system transcending what was later to be described as 'totalitarianism' with respect to unity, authority and coherence, might be advocated.

The first issue of *La Torre* having already stirred a certain degree of controversy, the editorial of issue number five, entitled 'Things Settled, Unequivocal Ideas', reaffirmed what had already been argued. The piece read: 'We are neither Fascists nor anti-Fascists. Anti-Fascism means nothing'; yet, we also suggested, for 'the irreducible enemies of all plebeian politics and "nationalist ideology", of all political plots and party spirit . . . Fascism is not enough.' 'We would like a more radical, intrepid Fascism: a truly absolute Fascism, founded on pure energy and subject to no compromise.' On these grounds, we argued that: 'The label "anti-Fascist" only suits us to the extent that it suits those wishing to go beyond Fascism.' The editorial ended with the words: 'We have no fear of admitting – and believe that those in charge should know – that *La Torre* represents an attempt to allow overseas commentators to judge the extent to which it is possible to exercise a rigorously imperial and traditionalist thought in Fascist Italy without political subjection, and with the genuine aim of defending certain ideals.'

Backlash followed – and not because of the doctrinal or cultural content of the magazine (which, given its elevated standard, was largely ignored by Fascists), but on account of one rubric entitled 'The Bow and the Club' (*'L'arco e la clava'*: where the bow strikes at a distance, the club does so only within range of one's hands). This rubric consisted of a newspaper review: an attack on the worst features of the contemporary press which spared no criticism whatsoever (just to provide an example, when a reader remarked that some of our views did not quite agree with those of Mussolini, we replied: 'All the worse for Mussolini'). It might certainly be argued, then, that *La Torre* represented something quite unique and unprecedented in Fascist Italy.

Fascist circles were initially shocked by our publication. Soon, however, we were made the object of more violent and brutal reactions, particularly because our 'club' was striking at real gangsters: men devoid of all qualifications, who had been awarded the role of arrogant representatives of Fascist 'thought' and 'culture' merely on account of their past as Blackshirts, or their dull fanaticism – a truly pathetic spectacle. A typical example of such people is the small (once Futurist) group behind *The Empire (L'Impero)*, a paper published by M. Carli[4] and E. Settimelli.[5] An even more significant case is that of one Asvero Gravelli,[6] a real blackmailer who was then the director of a magazine entitled *Antieuropa*, which addressed an overseas public. Gravelli's worthy ally was Guglielmo Danzi,[7] also the editor of a Fascist paper. The reason we criticised such people was that they were twisting ideas not too dissimilar from our own, while believing themselves untouchable because of the lofty position they had irresponsibly been awarded within Fascist circles. These people (all dead and forgotten by now) had already been charged with various crimes – which is not surprising given that libel, slander and calumny were the trademarks of the Blackshirts' approach to culture.

Accustomed, as they were, to acting with impunity, these 'Fascists' turned vicious when faced with our criticism. As they were incapable of defending themselves and addressing our criticism on an intellectual level, they resorted to more direct means. What followed were vile slanders, 'chivalrous' disputes, lawsuits, and acts of physical aggression. For a period of time, I was forced to walk around with a few bodyguards (other Fascists, sympathetic to my cause). Failing to meet their goals, these 'gentlemen', by way of their personal acquaintances, turned to the higher echelons of the Fascist Party, and to its former secretary, Achille Starace.[8] *La Torre* could not be suppressed – for the magazine was far from criticising Fascism from an anti-Fascist perspective, and promoted ideas which, in a sense, were more Right wing than what was then common (the only issue of *La Torre* to have been seized was the third issue, on the grounds of its attack on that veritable aberration known as the Fascist 'demographic campaign'). The police then informally asked me to stop publishing the magazine. As I ignored this suggestion, which had no legally binding value, the police forbade all publishers in Rome to print the magazine. I complained of this to Arpinati,[9] who was then the Minister of the Interior, and who had once published some of my writing in the cultural magazine he had founded at Bologna. No doubt, Arpinati himself had received orders from above, for he mentioned how difficult the publication of *La Torre* had become, and suggested we discuss the matter once things had settled. By then, however, I was sick of the whole thing, and went off to the mountains. I had published *La Torre* for a mere five months. Ten issues had been printed, and by the 15th of June 1930 it was all over.

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[4] Mario Carli (1888-1935) was an early Futurist who later fought in the First World War, and served in the ranks of D'Annunzio's army at Fiume. He became a journalist and a Fascist, although he remained somewhat unpopular as he adhered to the Left wing of Fascism. In the 1930s, he was dispatched to Brazil to serve as Italy's consul general. He died of illness in Rome. None of his writings have been translated.

[5] As a Futurist, Emilio Settimelli was particularly engaged in various theatrical and film projects. He later published some early books supporting Mussolini and Fascism. In *L'Impero*, he sometimes satirised leading Fascists, particularly at the time of the Fascist Concordat with the Vatican. Settimelli, like Evola, voiced his objections publicly, leading to his temporary imprisonment and expulsion from the Party. Some examples of his Futurist-era writings have been translated in various anthologies on Futurism.

[6] Asvero Gravelli, an early Fascist supporter, was also a well-known Fascist radio news commentator, and founder of the Action Committee for the Universality of Rome. *Antieuropa* was strongly opposed to Nazi anti-Semitism. Unlike many Fascists, Gravelli hoped to help create a Fascist International to export Fascism abroad. In 1943, he produced a film, *The Man with a Cross*, with Roberto Rossellini which supported anti-Communism on a Catholic basis. His essay, 'Towards a Fascist Europe', appears in Roger Griffin's anthology, *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[7] I can find nothing on Guglielmo Danzi apart from the fact that he was a noted Fascist journalist who also wrote books on the subject. None of his writings have been translated.

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[8] Achille Starace (1889-1945) was a First World War veteran and became a Fascist in 1920. He quickly rose through the ranks, and became Vice Secretary of the nascent Fascist Party in 1921, a position which he held, off and on, several times until 1939. After being dismissed from all positions within the Party for incompetence in 1941, he later tried to regain favour in the Italian Social Republic at Salò, but he was imprisoned by his former colleagues under the charge of weakening the Fascist regime by his failures. He was eventually released, then captured by anti-Fascist partisans while jogging in April 1945. After being sentenced to death on April 29, he was taken to see the body of Mussolini, which he saluted just before he was shot.

[9] Leandro Arpinati (1892-1945) was a former anarchist, and an early Fascist who helped to organize the Party in Bologna. He was also head of the Italian Football Federation. Although regarded as a highly effective administrator, he was dismissed from his position as Minister of the Interior by Mussolini as part of a general purge of individuals whom he felt threatened his power. Arpinati was later imprisoned for five years after being accused by Starace of helping to organise an assault on Mussolini. Despite this, in 1943, Mussolini asked Arpinati to join him at Salò, which he refused. Nevertheless, Arpinati was executed by anti-Fascist partisans in April 1945.

Both Fascist Party leaders and the police were keen to know who was behind *La Torre*. Such people could not imagine that a similar campaign might have been orchestrated by independent individuals, foreign to the Party and pursuing no political aims, but moved by sincere love for the ideals of the true Right. And yet, this was really the case.

This brief episode in my career was also revealing of the idealistic nature of my work at the time, and of my lack of tact and practicality – something which had already emerged with my publication of *Pagan Imperialism*. In order to have the freedom to operate as I pleased, it would have been necessary for me to have had some solid political backing. As no one really bothered to examine the matter in more detail, the rumours which followed the suppression of *La Torre* proved enough to alienate me for some time from most of the press and to give me an anti-Fascist reputation. I then decided to personally develop and present my ideas on Tradition in one systematic work, which would touch upon the history of civilisation and the critique of the modern world – matters which ought to have been discussed in a more accessible and detailed manner in *La Torre*. This is how my most important book, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, came into existence. It might now be worth ignoring the chronological framework for a moment, in order for me to describe one peculiar episode related to my publication of *La Torre*.

Within Fascism, certain men of character met an ill fate because of their denunciation of the misdeeds of powerful, influential members of the Party. One such man was Giovanni Preziosi,[10] who was stripped of editorial control over the Neapolitan paper *The Noon (Il Mezzogiorno)*, and was forced to limit his work to his old but combative monthly magazine *Italian Life (Vita Italiana)*. Preziosi gradually regained the trust of Mussolini, who, in a way, granted immunity to *Vita Italiana*: for here Preziosi was allowed to voice his personal opinion to everyone. Preziosi was also feared at the time because of a mysterious archive he had been assembling over the years. It was said that the contents of this archive could discredit many people, both past and present. While Preziosi remained deeply, almost feudally faithful to Mussolini, he was a free, brave, loyal and truly honest man. Not long after, Preziosi joined Roberto Farinacci,[11] an individual who held a unique position within the Fascist regime. Former Secretary of the Party at a critical time, Farinacci enjoyed significant prestige, not least because of his courage and strength of character (with regard to Mussolini, he refused to assume the servile attitude which almost everyone else adopted in the Duce's company). Farinacci, too, had lost Mussolini's favour, on account of having compromised the reputation of Mussolini's brother by revealing some shady business conducted by one of his protégés (a Party leader from Milan). Nevertheless, Farinacci retained an autonomous and influential role, and his newspaper, *The Fascist Regime (Regime Fascista)*, was the most 'orthodox' Fascist paper after *The People of Italy (Il Popolo d'Italia).*

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[10] Giovanni Preziosi (1881-1945) was an early Fascist and an anti-Semite who favoured an adoption of racial measures in Italy to mirror those of the Third Reich. He published the first Italian translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1920, and Evola was to write an introduction to the second edition in 1937. Preziosi always remained faithful to Mussolini and served in the government at Salò. In April 1945, he committed suicide rather than be captured by the Allies.

Preziosi had heard about *La Torre*, and knew perfectly well what gangsters and Party sharks we of *La Torre* were facing. He then invited me to publish my work in *Vita Italiana*, and subsequently put me in touch with Farinacci. Amazingly, I found a 'holy patron' in Farinacci. The man, of course, has not been spared the systematic and indiscriminate denigration which is conducted today with regard to figures of the past. What I can say of Farinacci, in all truth, is that he was a brave and loyal man. Those who supported Farinacci could be certain that he would not betray them, but defend their cause – if just – to the very end. Besides, as Farinacci enjoyed direct access to Mussolini, his friendship was of momentous importance. Farinacci acknowledged the limits of his own culture, and believed that I could be the right person to contribute to the Right wing intellectual revolution which certain individuals within the Fascist regime aspired to implement. Farinacci accepted my proposal to publish a special page entitled 'Problems of the Spirit in Fascist Ethics' in his paper *Regime Fascista*. I was granted complete freedom and full editorial control over this page. The fact that I had never joined the Party, nor intended to become a member, did not bother Farinacci, who trusted me completely. It so happened, paradoxically, that in these pages published in Farinacci's newspaper, I resumed my defence of those 'traditional' values which alone, I believed, could embody the higher potentialities of a 'Fascist' movement: the very endeavour which had caused me to be branded an 'anti-Fascist' in the first place. *La Torre*, purged of its more inflammatory *ad hominem* polemics, thus found a new, safe embodiment in the pages of one of the milestones of Fascist 'orthodoxy.'

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[11] Roberto Farinacci (1892-1945) was a First World War veteran who joined the Fascists in 1919. He quickly became a radical leader in the Party, and Mussolini appointed him as Secretary in 1925. He removed some of the more radical Party members who opposed the Duce, and became notorious for torturing his prisoners with castor oil. However, he still had disagreements with Mussolini over national policy, and resigned his position in 1926. He later fought in the Abyssinian War and the Spanish Civil War, and in 1935 he became a member of the Fascist Grand Council, where he favoured adopting anti-Semitic measures in Italy. In July 1943, he backed Mussolini, and as a result was forced to flee to Germany following the Duce's arrest. The Nazis considered placing him at the head of the Italian Social Republic, but appointed Mussolini after the latter's rescue by Otto Skorzeny. He returned to Italy but remained out of politics, and was executed by anti-Fascist partisans in 1945.

I published my page in *Regime Fascista* for many years. If I am not mistaken, I began in 1932 and continued throughout the war. Almost each issue featured the contribution of an overseas writer, in order to provide a picture of the cultural and political milieu of the European Right. Among these writers, I might mention Gonzague de Reynold,[12] Sir Charles Petrie,[13] Prince K.A. Rohan,[14] O. Spann,[15] E. Dodsworth, F. Everling (monarchist deputy in the Reichstag)[16] and A.E. Günther.[17] René Guénon granted me to publish a translation of extracts from books and essays of his, which he first signed using the pseudonym of Ignitus, and later using his real name. In this page, I even featured the work of a prominent Jew, Wolfskehl,[18] who had once belonged to the circle of Stefan George.[19] Other names included former colleagues of mine from *La Torre*, who numbered among the few representatives of 'traditionalist' and aristocratic thought in Italy.

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[12] Gonzague de Reynold (1880-1970) was a Swiss Catholic and a historian who opposed modernity and democracy. He believed it was the mission of the West to spread Western values and Christianity to the rest of the world, but felt that this mission had been lost in the modern West, and he favoured a return to its ancient values. None of his writings have been translated.

[13] Sir Charles Petrie (1895-1977) was a historian and monarchist with a particular interest in Jacobitism. Although opposed to National Socialism, he praised Mussolini and supported Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s. During the 1940s, he supported Winston Churchill and became active in the Conservative Party. He published many books, including one on Mussolini.

[14] Prince Karl Anton Rohan (1898-1975) was an Austrian First World War veteran, monarchist and anti-modernist who later supported both Fascism and National Socialism, and hoped for a reconciliation between Christianity and the latter. He published his own *European Review (Europäische Revue)* from 1925 until 1936, which called for the creation of a new European identity in keeping with Europe's unique cultural and religious mission, and which would revive Europe's ancient values. None of his writings have been translated.

[15] Othmar Spann (1878-1950) was an Austrian Catholic philosopher and economist who held neoconservative views based on the ideals of German Romanticism. He is credited with developing the idea of the corporate state, which was soon to become so integral to Fascism, and which Spann believed could be applied everywhere for the benefit of humanity. In spite of this, he did not support National Socialism, and he was imprisoned after the Anschluss in 1938 and forbidden to teach at the University of Vienna (where had had taught

The publication of my own section in Farinacci's paper was, again, something rather unique at the time. Yet few people took advantage of the possibilities it offered; and not because of objective hindrances – for both

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since 1919). He attempted to return to teaching after 1945, but was again rejected. Several of his books are available in English.

[16] Friedrich Everling (1891-1958) served in the Reichstag, first as a member of the conservative German National People's Party from 1919, as a 'guest' of the Nazis from 1933, and then as a National Socialist Party member from 1938 until 1945. He sometimes published under the pen name, Schlehdorn. He has not been translated.

[17] Albrecht Erich Günther (1893-1942) was a German Conservative Revolutionary writer who supported National Socialism. He believed that science and technology could be successfully united with traditional culture in order to produce a new class which would be capable of revitalising the world through war. He has not been translated.

[18] Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948) was a German Jewish author and dramatist who was best known as a poet. He was a German nationalist who ardently supported his nation's cause, believing it to be for the betterment of all Europe, in the First World War. He was later forced to flee Germany when the National Socialists came to power in 1933, and moved several times thereafter, dying in New Zealand. Interestingly, he introduced the expression 'secret Germany' to George's circle, describing the cultural mission of Germany in the world. George used the term as the title of one of his poems, which he dedicated to one of his disciples, Berthold von Stauffenberg, the brother of George's most famous student, Claus von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg was to use the term to give a name to his conspiracy to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. Wolfskehl's anti-Nazi work, *1933: A Poem Sequence in German and English* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947) was published in English.

[19] Stefan George (1868-1933) was a German poet with a strong mystical bent who was regarded as one of the most prominent poets of his time, influenced by both Nietzsche and the French Symbolists. Some even regarded him as a prophet, and he always had a circle of devoted young disciples around him. He favoured an aristocratic view of hierarchy and spirituality, and, in spite of his artistic style, was an anti-modernist. He welcomed Jews as friends and members of his circle, but was suspicious of their overall influence in Europe. He rejected biological racism in favour of a more spiritual concept of race, similar in some respects to Evola's. Although the National Socialists appropriated him as a forerunner of theirs, George himself disliked National Socialism for being too bourgeois. His poetical works have undergone numerous translations.

Farinacci and I (and this certainly goes to Farinacci's merit) cared little whether the writers we published might be members of the Party or not: potential collaborators, in this respect, had little to fear (and besides, they would also have received some financial compensation for their contribution to the paper). But despite all this, my page received little attention, and I struggled to get my hands on the appropriate kind of material (my selection of writings being a rigorous one, of course, as to assure a coherent approach).

The fact that my editorial endeavour was largely overlooked was perhaps due to the inappropriateness of the paper to host such a subject: for *Regime Fascista* was a political newspaper rather than a cultural magazine. Such a lack of response, however, is also indicative of 'Fascist culture' at the time, which was really rather pathetic. The Fascist 'revolution' in Italy had only affected certain political bodies: even from a political perspective, it had only been a half-hearted attempt at revolution, which never led to the development of a coherent, systematic and uncompromising doctrine of the State. This is not the right place to discuss what elements of Fascism might have assumed a traditional character (and thus have acted not as something new, but as the specific adaptations of ideas reflecting the great, traditional politics of Europe); and what features of Fascism, on the contrary, were the worst (most notably: its promotion of 'totalitarianism' in place of 'organic statehood'; its ambition to embody a regime of the masses; its Napoleonic dictatorship and emphasis on the personal figure of the Leader; its half-hearted corporatism; its attempt to overcome the class divisions established by Marxism in the industrial and economic sphere by means of inefficient bureaucratic superstructures; the grotesque, insolent and pedagogic attitude of Gentile's 'ethical State'). In strictly cultural terms, however, the Fascist 'revolution' was simply a joke. All that was required in order to become a representative of Fascist 'culture' was to be a member of the Party and to pay formal, conformist tribute to the Duce. All else was more or less irrelevant.

Mussolini once said that Party membership did not bestow intelligence. He also ought to have pointed out that intelligence, in itself, has nothing to do with the kind of spiritual education which Fascism sought to cultivate. Instead of starting from scratch, of ignoring fame and big names, instead of subjecting each intellectual candidate to a radical reassessment, Fascism, with provincial and bourgeois ambition, chose to welcome all the 'cultural representatives' of the bourgeoisie, as long as they could give proof of their formal (and irrelevant) adherence to the regime. This led to pathetic cases such as that of the Accademia d'Italia, the members of which were largely agnostic or anti-Fascist in their private beliefs. But the same is also true of many other men who were assigned prominent roles within the Fascist cultural establishment and media. It is not surprising, therefore, to find many of these gentlemen now donning a new uniform in democratic, anti-Fascist Italy.

A particularly pathetic case is that of the so-called Istituto di Studi Romani[20] (Institute of Roman Studies). As Rome had been chosen as the highest symbol of the Fascist 'revolution', it would only have been natural for the Fascist regime to foster a detailed, lively and systematic study of the values and expressions of Roman civilisation (even if of a different and less extreme kind from the study I had personally presented in *Pagan Imperialism*). And yet, the Fascist regime made do with this clerical and bourgeois institute, which confined itself to formal semi-academic exercises in the fields of philology, archaeology, art history and the like. Ironically, it was overseas scholars – such as Bachofen, Altheim,[21] W. Otto,[22] Piganiol,[23] Dumézil[24] and

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[20] The Istituto was created by the Fascists in 1925, intended to help connect Fascism's pedigree to that of the Roman Empire. It continues to exist today, albeit with very different goals.

[21] Franz Altheim (1898-1976) was a German historian with a strong interest in Classical Rome. Although at first he resisted National Socialism, by 1936 he realized that he would have to embrace Nazi views if he were to continue his work. As a result, he began working for the SS Ahnenerbe in 1937 (although he never joined the SS or the Nazi Party), and, with financial support from Heinrich Himmler, he went on lengthy research trips in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. His stated purpose was to conduct research on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, but he also cultivated Nazi ties to the Rumanian Iron Guard, as well as to pro-German Arabs in Iraq and Syria, and wrote secret intelligence reports for Himmler. After the war, his Nazi past forgotten, he resumed teaching in Berlin. One of his books was translated: *A History of Roman Religion* (London: Methuen, 1938).

[22] I believe that Evola is referring to Walter Friedrich Otto (1874-1958), who was a well-known German Classical scholar. During the Nazi period, he worked at the Nietzsche Archive. Several of his books are available in English. He may also be referring to Walter Gustav Albrecht Otto, another German Classical scholar of the period, who is untranslated.

[23] André Piganiol (1883-1968) was a French archaeologist and historian of the Roman Empire. He coined a phrase which became famous among Classicists: 'Roman civilisation did not die its own death. It was murdered', referring to the Germanic tribes. Some of his work appears in the anthology, *The Historical Problem of the Fall of Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950).

[24] Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) was a French philologist best known as a pioneer

Kerényi[25] – who most contributed towards the Fascist myth of Rome. It was with sarcasm that foreigners acquainted with my own defence of the Roman ideal discussed the only centre that Fascism had officially established to study the subject: the Institute I just mentioned, which, naturally enough, was destined to survive the crisis of Fascism and to carry on its squalid activities in the anti-Fascist milieu of democratic Italy (which now mocks the Roman ideal, accusing it of fostering idle rhetoric).

So much, then, for 'Fascist culture'. I will mention one more fact which illustrates how the editorial activities I pursued, even when under the kind of official protection I mentioned, were ignored by the mainstream press then, just as they are today (for the mainstream press has continued to ignore my work, even after the publication of *Revolt Against the Modern World*). Paradoxically, I elicited more interest overseas, where I was seen as the chief representative of a revolutionary culture (or, rather, of a revolutionary worldview and approach to history) – much to the chagrin of those people who dominated the cultural milieu of Italy and who had secured a place for themselves in the exclusive circuits of official culture. It is only natural, therefore, for the legacy of Fascist 'culture' to be non-existent. It is said that Fascism ruined the Italian people. Military issues notwithstanding, I would rather argue the opposite: that it is the Italians who ruined Fascism; for Italy proved incapable of providing the kind of people who might develop the superior potentialities of Fascism while neutralising its negative aspects (and this, of course, not merely from the point of view of culture).

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in mythography. He also studied the nature of sovereignty in ancient Indo-European civilisations, which led him to postulate the Trifunctional Hypothesis: namely, that Indo-European culture had developed along a tripartite structure of warriors, priests and farmers. He believed that this was the origin of both the Hindu caste system and the feudal system in Medieval Europe. Like Evola, he served as an artillery officer during the First World War.

[25] Karl Kerényi (1897-1973) was a Romanian scholar of Classics and religion who was known for his studies of Greek mythology. In the 1940s, he befriended C.G. Jung, with whom he sometimes collaborated, and he became one of the famous participants at the Eranos conferences. Many of his works have been translated.

HERMETICISM AND MY CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALISM – THE CATHOLIC PROBLEM

After this excursus on Fascist culture, which I hope might prove of some general retrospective interest, I would now like to return to my work on traditional and esoteric disciplines in the period that followed my engagement with *La Torre*. In 1931, for Laterza, I published *The Hermetic Tradition* (*La tradizione ermetica*); in 1932, for Bocca, *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* (*Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo*).

The subject of the former book I had first discussed in some of the essays published in *Introduction to Magic*. I largely owed my acquaintance with Hermetic literature to Reghini: he had lent some ancient works to me, while others he had mentioned to me; in some of his articles, Reghini had also provided the interpretative keys by which certain alchemical and Hermetic symbolism could be approached. French groups also contributed to my knowledge of the subject: this is particularly true of the study group behind *The Veil of Isis (Le Voile d'Isis)* magazine (which later became the Guénonian publication *Traditional Studies [Études Traditionnelles]*).[1]

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[1] *Le Voile d'Isis* was originally started in 1890 by Gerard Encausse (also known as 'Papus'), founder of the Martinist Order, a group which Guénon joined in 1906, and it was there that he first developed his ideas on perennialism. The journal itself began to focus more on Guénon's ideas, and became *Études Traditionnelles* in 1930. It continued publishing until 1992, and was one of the primary traditionalist publications.

As had been the case with my approach to Tantrism, in my study of Hermeticism I began by focusing on the primary sources, gathering as much reliable information as possible, in order to provide an overview of the subject along 'traditionalist' lines. The full title of my book was *The Doctrine, Symbols and Regal Art of the Hermetic Tradition* (*La tradizione ermetica nella sua dottrina, nei suoi simboli e nella sua Arte Regia*). What I chiefly focused on was alchemical *Hermetica*. These texts consist of those works of mythical origin which are first recorded in the Hellenistic period in Greek and Syriac form. This tradition was later continued by the Arabs, from whose hands it reached the European West, where it flourished in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, up to the dawn of modern scientific chemistry.

From an external point of view, all the texts of this ancient doctrine discuss chemical and metallurgic operations – particularly the production of gold, of the philosophers' stone and of the elixir of wisdom. The practical and operative side of this discipline was termed the hieratic or regal art; it was expressed by means of both a coded and symbolic language that sounded obscure to profane ears, and of the myths of Classical Antiquity. Naturally enough, modern culture interpreted alchemy as an infantile, superstitious and myth-loving sort of chemistry – something of interest to the historian of science, but which had certainly been rendered obsolete by the advent of scientific chemistry. A similar analysis, however, ignores what Hermetic authors have always made clear: that their writings are not to be taken literally, for they are written in a secret language. Hermetic authors claimed to be writing only for themselves and for those who already know, as their secret doctrine can exclusively be learned from a Master or by means of sudden enlightenment. Moreover, it is also evident that the basic worldview shared by Hermetic authors – their understanding of nature and of man – radically differs from that of modern science; and that it rather coincides with the worldview of Gnosticism, theurgy, magic, and of all ancient hieratic doctrines. In other words, it is clear that alchemy pertains to an altogether different spiritual realm from that of ordinary chemistry.

I sought to pursue a systematic study of the Hermetic and alchemical tradition in order to emphasise its true essence as an initiatory science concealed by the use of chemical and metallurgic language. In my work, I pointed out that the substances mentioned in alchemical texts are actually symbols embodying the energies and forces present in man and nature (nature which is here approached *sub specie interioritatis*,[2] in its hyper-physical aspects). The various alchemical operations are essentially concerned with the initiatory transformation of the human being. Alchemical 'gold' is a metaphor for the immortal and invulnerable being, here conceived in terms of the aforementioned theory of conditioned immortality, which is to say: not as a given, but rather as something which is to be obtained by means of a secret procedure. On the whole, alchemy is founded on a specific cosmology and a symbolic operative system.

What I have just said applies to the most genuine and essential side of the alchemical tradition, stripped of its dross and of secondary or accessory components. The 'dross' of alchemy consists of the speculations and endeavours of those individuals who have mistakenly taken alchemical symbolism literally, and have performed all sorts of material tasks and disorderly experiments – which can indeed be described as infantile and pre-scientific attempts at chemistry. The true 'sons of Hermes', however, dubbed such people 'coal-burners', to signify that they were nothing but profane practitioners who might lead the true science of alchemy to its ruin.

As for the secondary or accessory components of alchemy, these consist in the possibility of actually changing matter: for instance, by transforming metals, but by very different means from those of modern science – by means, that is, of altering matter 'from within', thanks to supra-normal abilities closely related to the internal self-transformation of the initiate (this being the chief purpose of the alchemical art).

In the light of these aims of the regal art, any 'psychological' and psychoanalytic interpretation of alchemy, of the kind which has recently been suggested, clearly appears inadequate. Alchemy has nothing to do with the products of the subconscious, with images of libido or with the involuntary and compulsive manifestation of Jungian 'archetypes' on the unreal and subjective level of the human psyche. Rather, alchemical processes are concrete operations possessing genuine power and deriving from specific forms of knowledge. An emphasis on these features of alchemy is what informed my own treatment of the subject.

The purpose of my book, however, was not only to provide an interpretation of alchemical Hermeticism from an initiatory perspective, but also to focus on alchemy as the embodiment of one of the two chief paths of Tradition: the regal, active and virile path – the other being the priestly, or ascetic and contemplative, path. Alchemical Hermeticism certainly placed an emphasis on the practical and operative side of the Art, and hence on action and spiritual 'experimentation'. The very name most frequently given to alchemy is revealing in this sense: alchemy is the *ars regia*, the regal art. But more revealing still are the stages of alchemical self-realisation. According to all texts, the alchemical Great Work consists of three main phases, symbolised by three different colours: black, white and red, which correspond to the phases of *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo* respectively. *Nigredo*, also known as the 'blackening', roughly corresponds to the death of the physical 'I', and to the transcendence of the limits of ordinary individuality. *Albedo*, or the 'whitening', represents the ecstatic opening experienced by the initiate, his experience of light, but merely in a passive manner – which is why this phase is also known as the rule of the Woman or of the Moon. *Albedo* is then transcended when one reaches the final and most perfect stage in the alchemical process: *rubedo* or the 'reddening', which consists of the reaffirmation of the virile, sovereign nature – so that the Woman is overcome by the rule of Fire and of the Sun. Some Hermetic authors explicitly link the colour red to regal or imperial purple.

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[2] Latin: 'from the inner point of view.'

Later, in 1932, I published a critical edition of the work of a seventeenth-century Italian follower of Hermeticism, Cesare della Riviera,[3] for Laterza. The work is entitled *The Magical World of Heroes* (*Il mondo magico de gli Heroi*) and dedicated to a prince of Savoy. Besides the revealing direct identification of the Hermetic initiate with the figure of the 'hero', what is most interesting in this work is the fact that it defines the ultimate, secret goal of the *ars regia* as the conquest of the 'Second Wood of Life', which is to say: the overcoming – by means of an action aimed at avoiding any titanic and Luciferian Fall – of all obstacles along the path leading to the place from which Adam, according to Biblical myth, had once been banished so that he might not lay his hands on the Tree of Life.

The Hermetic texts I focused on, therefore, testified to the underground endurance of a tradition embodying that branch of the Primordial Tradition I was personally most interested in, even in the context of a civilination where an exoteric form – Christianity – of the opposite character had prevailed. As possible reasons for the aforementioned disguise adopted by alchemical doctrine, then, I not only mentioned the obvious fact that all traditional 'inner doctrines' – i.e., all forms of esotericism – are kept secret, but also the fact that the initiatory ideal of Hermeticism is truly in contrast with Christian religious values. Had Hermeticism merely consisted of a particular brand of mysticism, a kind of salvationist doctrine of rebirth and ecstasy (as some have suggested), there would have been no need for it to employ such veiled language. Alchemical Hermeticism, rather, embodied a pre-Christian and non-Christian spiritual tradition. In this regard, the role of pagan mythology within alchemy is certainly revealing – the gods and their endeavours symbolising the teachings, different levels and operations of the *ars regia.*

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[3] Evola discusses Cesare della Riviera at length in *The Hermetic Tradition*.

C.G. Jung, on his own accord, claimed that my book on alchemical Hermeticism was one of the most important studies of the subject ever to have been written. I honestly believe that my work remains the most exhaustive treatment of alchemy from an inner, traditionalist perspective. A second edition of the book was published by Laterza in 1948; a third by Edizioni Mediterranee in 1971. In 1962, Chacornac published a French translation of the text, which includes a few additional quotations. Admittedly, on account of editorial limitations, my book discussed only a small part of the material I had gathered in the course of my personal investigation of the subject.

In 1932, a year after my publication of *The Hermetic Tradition*, Laterza published another book of mine: *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism*, which was subtitled 'A Critical Analysis of the Chief Supernatural Currents in Modern Times'. I had already come to discuss this subject in some of the essays I had published in the magazines *Literary Italy (L'Italia Letteraria)* and *La Torre.* Part of my interest in such matters derived from the fact that certain people, as had been the case following my publication of *Pagan Imperialism*, continued to accuse me of being a 'Theosophist' and a 'Freemason', on account of my interest in traditional doctrines. Guénon had already felt the need to defend traditional doctrines from similar accusations: in two of his early works, *L'Erreur spirite*[4] and *Le Théosophisme*,[5] Guénon had denounced the errors and muddled views of modern Spiritualism[6] and Theosophy, emphasising the spurious and deviant character of such currents. I sought then to follow in Guénon's steps by extending his criticism to other contemporary movements.

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[4] Guénon's third book, it was published in 1923. It has been published in English as *The Spiritist Fallacy* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2003).

[5] Guénon's second book, it was published in 1921. It has been published in English as *Theosophy, the History of a Pseudo-Religion* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2003).

To some extent, in writing this book, I unintentionally came to focus on other matters as well. My aim was to address a broader readership by directly addressing the need to defend human personality from the dangerous allure of the 'supernatural'. My main argument was that the modern world is facing not merely the threat of 'materialism', but also a 'spiritualist threat'. People in our day, I argued, are at the mercy of the materialism, rationalism, empiricism and activism of a dying civilisation; but, at the same time, they derive no satisfaction from mainstream religion. Consequently, many of our contemporaries experience an uncontrollable attraction for 'Otherness' and supra-sensible phenomena, particularly when these are seen as being grounded within actual personal experiences. In almost all cases, this supra-sensible level of experience has been confused, simplistically, with that of the 'supernatural'.

This momentous confusion, I argued, is due to a lack of genuine ideals. In my book, I outlined the doctrine according to which human personality, with its ordinary capabilities and its perception of the physical world and nature, is situated between two different realms. The first of these two realms is superior to the ordinary human condition, while the other is inferior to it. The first is the level of what is sub-natural and sub-personal, while the other is supernatural and super-personal. Nor are these different levels to be understood in merely theoretical and abstract terms, for they refer to concrete and possible levels of being: 'In all that transcends mere nature' – I argued – 'two separate, or, rather, two opposite levels exist.' Hence the possibility of self-transcendence either by descent (i.e., by plunging into what is pre- and sub-personal and unconscious) or by ascent (i.e., by rising above the closed – and in a sense defensive and protective – condition of ordinary human personality). In my work, I emphasised how it is self-transcendence by descent which is most commonly pursued in contemporary Spiritualism: Spiritualism, when not merely theoretical, fosters a regressive process which potentially leads to encounters with dark forces that can only further weaken the feeble spiritual framework of modern man.

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[6] Modern Spiritualism, or Spiritism as it is known in France, is an international movement which began in the Nineteenth century. It claims roots in the doctrines of the Eighteenth century Swedish mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg. Strongly Christian in character, adherents believe that supernatural phenomena can be evoked by communication with the dead via mediums. Spiritualism continues to survive in various forms today.

I described the opposite process in the following terms: as 'A path leading to experiences which, far from diminishing consciousness, turn it into a super-consciousness that not only does not abolish the distinction between material objects and rational thought – a distinction easily maintained by a healthy and wakeful mind – but has the power to elevate such a distinction to a higher level – not by altering the foundations of human personality, but by supplementing them.' I concluded that it is this path alone that can lead to the supernatural. Known by the 'inner doctrines' of the world of Tradition, such a path stands in contrast to all ecstatic regressions and openings to what is sub-intellectual and subconscious.

Having thus traced the chief point of reference of my work – something which I had already done several years before, in the course of my philosophical enquiries – I now sought to examine various contemporary currents in order to define their positive and negative sides from both a doctrinal and a practical perspective. I will here only mention a few of the points I raised in the book.

Firstly, I investigated the fields of 'spiritualism' and of 'psychic research' (or 'metapsychics'). The former field, along with clairvoyance and similar methods of evocation – all cases of mystification notwithstanding – provides a typical example of 'self-transcendence by descent', of an inner opening to what is inferior: the products of psychic dissociation, larval residues and obscure influences of all sorts, and troubled manifestations of the subconscious. As for 'metapsychics' or 'parapsychology', it erroneously seeks to apply a scientific method based on mere experimental, external investigations to a field where the application of similar methods can only lead to the discovery of trivialities – for the same 'extra-normal' phenomena, provided they are genuine, can be due to a range of different factors, and possess either a 'sub-personal', regressive character or a 'super-personal' one. Besides, it is necessarily almost always the case that similar investigations concern spurious phenomena devoid of any spiritual significance: for it is clear that no superior personality, no initiate or ascetic will ever allow himself to be observed and measured by metapsychics, or condescend to produce 'phenomena' which can be easily controlled.

What followed in the book was a critique of psychoanalysis, particularly that of the Freudian school (as I already mentioned, I was later to integrate this critique through a discussion of the Jungian approach in one of the essays I published in the second edition of *Introduction to Magic*). In its own way, psychoanalysis fosters a regressive shift towards the irrational and subpersonal ground of human personality, which it conceives as the pre-eminent influence behind the human psyche. Freud's sexual characterisation of this substrate, chiefly in terms of libido, was merely a secondary deviation. What I emphasised in my analysis was, rather, the fact that psychoanalytic theory implies an inverted morality, for it seeks to encourage nature and instinct above personality, in order to remove the degrading, and often psychopathic, tensions which afflict internally divided beings. In other words, Freudian psychoanalysis shuns the notion of an autonomous and sovereign spiritual principle – which, in the form of the 'super-ego', is rather envisaged by psychoanalysts in pathological terms. Again, this is clearly a case of regressive polarisation. One thing I particularly emphasised in my analysis was the fact that psychoanalysis is a product of its day. While the psychoanalytical view of man appears absurd and grotesque when applied to humanity in its normal condition, it certainly serves to describe what man, in the course of his devolution, has become. Emphasis on the subconscious – on the influence of a murky psychic underground active beyond the illusory forms of pseudo-personality – and disregard for the superior realm of super-conscience, are the two features which define psychoanalysis as an approach and cultural phenomenon of a limited and, in a sense, daemonic nature. And yet, psychoanalysis no doubt also reflects the existential condition of humanity in decline.

The two following chapters of the book provided a critique of both Anglo-Indian Theosophy (i.e., the teachings of Blavatsky and Besant,[7] which

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[7] Annie Besant (1847-1933) was an Irish Freemason who was also active in various socialist and humanitarian causes. She abandoned these after encountering Blavatsky's work, and became a Theosophist. After Blavatsky's death, Besant became the President of the Theosophical Society. After moving to India to be at the centre of Theosophy, she claimed to develop clairvoyance, and also became a leader in the Home Rule League in 1916, which sought to exploit Britain's dependence upon India for its war effort to gain independence for the colony from the British Empire. The League was dissolved in 1921, when India's independence movement threw its support to Gandhi's Indian National Congress.

Guénon chose to describe as *le théosophisme* rather than as theosophy – the latter term possessing august antecedents) and of Steiner's Anthroposophy. The nature of these chapters was more theoretical; their purpose, to distinguish authentic traditional doctrines from the distortion perpetrated by these sects, which were influenced by the prejudices of modern Western (and particularly Anglo-Saxon) thought (evolutionism, humanitarianism, democracy). Perhaps, as Guénon suggested, I ought to have been more critical of Anthroposophy, and ought to have spent some more words on the figure of its founder, Rudolf Steiner.[8] What was paradoxical in the case of Steiner was the fact that he had shown himself aware of the need for a 'spiritual science' – which is to say: of the need for a discipline that would apply the same values of positivism, clarity and exactitude which define modern natural sciences to the field of the supra-sensitive (something which initiatory techniques indeed do, as I emphasised in *Introduction to Magic*). But then again, Anthroposophy largely consisted of an orgy of visionary pursuits and acts of pseudo-clairvoyance, and of all kinds of digressions set in a most pedantic framework. Steiner's case revealed the dangers of employing certain mental techniques. For any attempt to strive for a 'thought freed from the senses', and of freeing one's imagination from ordinary conditioning, inevitably creates a 'gap'; and in those cases where the lack of consecration, or of personal dignity, or of an effective link with an adequate initiatory 'chain', prevent the individual from possessing the necessary defences, such a gap is filled by 'autonomous complexes': by psychic influences of a visionary kind, which, at this stage, are unfortunately perceived by the individual in question as being absolutely real. I had already reached similar conclusions years earlier, thanks to what I had experienced through my use of drugs. Such, then, is the occult background of most Steinerian Anthroposophy. Moreover, the risks I have just described were increased in the case of Anthroposophist practices by Steiner's capricious insistence on the idea of 'individual initiation', or 'initiation of the "I"', which Steiner conceived as a path that any individual can follow on his own, with no protection (Steiner absurdly and frivolously chose to describe such a path as the superior path of 'modern initiation': something unknown to Antiquity and to the East, and only made possible by the historical coming of Christ). The fanaticism of Anthroposophists merely reflects their inner failings and obsessions.

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[8] According to Renato Del Ponte, in his Preface to *Introduction to Magic*, Evola's attitude toward Steiner always remained somewhat contradictory. Although he frequently denigrated Anthroposophy in his writing, he was on good terms with a number of Anthroposophists, left works written by Anthroposophists remain in later editions of *Introduction to Magic* which he edited, and even described Steiner as a man 'gifted' with the 'solar element' in an 'ascetic direction', giving him spiritual illumination, in Evola's 1941 work, *A Synthesis of a Doctrine of Race* (*Sintesi di dottrina della razza*).

In another chapter of the book, I discussed the issue of mysticism, and considered those cases in which ecstasy represents something destructive for a developed personality (which, as I mentioned, is what I was concerned with in my study). I here discussed the case of Krishnamurti,[9] and the theory of absolute liberation which Krishnamurti presented after distancing himself from the Theosophists (who wished to make a 'vehicle' of Krishnamurti as the manifestation of a new Messiah). I emphasised what I saw as the chief problem with Krishnamurti's theory: the fact that his incentive runs the likely risk of being interpreted by modern Western man – who tends to confuse freedom with escapism and with the rejection of all discipline – as an incentive to anarchy, and the destruction of all forms and inner norms. Moreover, Krishnamurti espoused the ambiguously mystical idea of the liberation of 'Life' (as opposed to liberation *from* life), almost with the same irrational overtones as Bergson, Klages[10] and many other contemporary authors. In the course of my critique, I emphasised the centrality of Tradition, something completely ignored by Krishnamurti, who had misunderstood and then abandoned his own Hindu tradition, while encouraging Westerners to do the same. In the preface to the second edition of my book, which was published in 1949, again by Laterza, I emphasised the following ideas: '1) The *transcendence* of a given tradition ought not be confused with one's inability to *meet the standards* of such a tradition – as is the case with all individualists, "cynical minds" and modern freethinkers; 2) one should be capable of recognising when a given limit leads to obstruction, and when, on the contrary, it offers protection; 3) one of the worst perversions and misunderstandings occurs when that which applies to what is "more than human" is applied to the merely human individual, and particularly to modern man; I accept no responsibility in this regard.' Here I also ought to have mentioned the saying that: 'Certain truths are like sharp blades: unless sheathed, they cause injury.'

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[9] Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was 'discovered' as a boy through a chance meeting with the Theosophist, C.W. Leadbeater, in 1909. Leadbeater believed he was clairvoyant and claimed that he could sense that Krishnamurti was the 'World Teacher', or messiah, for whom the Theosophists had been searching, and who, it was believed, would transform the world. Krishnamurti was raised and educated by the Theosophists in preparation for his messianic destiny. He became increasingly suspicious of Theosophical doctrines, however, and publicly renounced Theosophy and his own messianism in 1929. Later, he came to dismiss all religious or philosophical systems, and taught that true knowledge and freedom could only come from the complete abrogation of the intellect, a teaching which has attracted many Westerners. Krishnamurti wrote extensively in English.

[10] Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) was a German vitalist philosopher who was quite influential on his contemporaries. Klages emphasised the importance of individual will, and especially of Eros, which he understood in the Platonic sense of a quest for knowledge which will lead to one's completeness. Although an anti-Semite, his ideas were rejected by the Nazis for being contrary to National Socialism. The only book of his to be translated is *The Science of Character* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1929). Also recommended is the Web site, *Ludwig Klages: Biocentric Metaphysics* (www.revilo-oliver.com/Writers/Klages/Ludwig_Klages.html).

As might easily be discerned, in the course of my studies I gradually came to redefine, rather than abandon the abstract theories I had developed in the first stage of my career. The aforementioned second edition of *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* included a new chapter on those dangers I had examined previously; its title was 'Primitivism, Madmen and Supermen'. On the one hand, I examined that regressive path leading to primitivism which is typical of modern thought, in the light of both the world of savage peoples and of contemporary attempts to 'return to nature'. On the other hand, I discussed the path of Nietzsche's (but also Dostoevsky's) *Übermensch*, a path which potentially leads to madness and complete collapse, unless its breaking point is overcome by means of an existential transformation and a change of polarity – i.e., by attaining 'transcendence' (here understood in its 'Olympian' and non-dualistic, rather than its theistic and religious sense). I was to further develop these ideas in one of my most recent books, *Ride the Tiger* (*Cavalcare la Tigre* – which was published in 1961 and then again in 1971).

It is not by chance that the following and final chapter in the book bore the title of 'Magic in the Modern World'. Here, I examined the way in which certain modern authors and modern groups approach doctrines pertaining to the realm of 'magic' (understood in the specific, spiritual and positive sense I already defined when discussing the Ur Group). This was an altogether different level from that of the other features of modern spiritualist movements I had already criticised. Part of my analysis was based on the crucial teachings of Eliphas Lévi,[11] Gurdjieff,[12] Giuliano Kremmerz (who, in the Italy of the late Nineteenth century, had established the operative 'chain' of Myriam) and Gustav Meyrink. The latter is the author of novels which reflect esoteric knowledge in an exceptionally pure fashion (for this reason, I was later to translate three of Meyrink's novels: *Walpurgis Night*,[13] *The White Dominican*[14] and *The Angel of the West Window*[15] – which I published for Bocca under a pseudonym). The aforementioned authors had followed the 'pagan path to awakening', a path based on the integration of human personality by means of an active ascesis free of religious myths and moral concerns, and founded on experimentation. What I criticised in this case were not central features of these authors' doctrines, but rather things like the limits of so-called 'ceremonial' forms of magic (i.e., those forms of magic based on rituals and formulae, which tend to almost objectify certain entities and forces) and certain 'occultist' overtones (by which I meant the bad habit of speaking *ex cathedra*[16] and *ex tripode*[17] in an obscure, mysterious and incomplete manner). Nevertheless, the aforementioned authors had all emphasised what is truly essential: 'the supreme possibility of changing the perishable personality of man into that of a demigod partaking of Olympian immortality' – something which effectively corresponds to the path of self-transcendence by ascent (i.e., the path leading to what is truly supernatural).

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[11] Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875) was a French occultist of great stature in his day, particularly influencing the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley (indeed, Crowley claimed to be his reincarnation). Many of his books have been translated.

[12] G.I. Gurdjieff (1866?-1949) was an Armenian mystic who founded a very influential spiritual discipline which came to be called the Fourth Way, the students of which remain active today. He utilised a syncretic approach to religion, extracting whatever he felt suited his system but not subscribing to any single path. He believed that his sacred dances, or 'Gurdjieff movements', could lift individuals out of their natural state of inward sleeping, and awaken them to true consciousness, when combined with mental and emotional techniques of discipline. All of his works are available in English.

[13] The pseudonym used by Evola for his Meyrink translations was Gattopardo. This book was published as *La notte di Valpurga* (Milan: Bocca, 1944). It is available in English as *Walpurgisnacht* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1993).

[14] This book was published as *Il domenicano bianco* (Milan: Bocca, 1944). It is available in English as *The White Dominican* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1994).

[15] This book was published as *L'angelo della finestra d'Occidente* (Milan: Bocca, 1949). It is available in English as *The Angel of the West Window* (London: Dedalus, 1991).

[16] Latin: 'from authority', particularly Papal authority, which is supposedly infallible.

[17] Latin: 'from the tripod', meaning the three-footed stool upon which the Priestess of Apollo sat at Delphi, while speaking as an oracle.

My main critique in this final chapter, however, concerned something quite different. What I noted was the fact that the magical path had always been exclusively open to the few. On the other hand, neo-spiritualism has frequently sought to popularise esoteric doctrines and to turn them into a surrogate religion – or rather a mere commodity, given the Spiritualist rejection of dogmas and all positive ties. In such a way, I sarcastically argued, one could witness old maids, weaklings, pensioners, humanitarians and vegetarians all wholeheartedly embracing the doctrines of initiation and of the *Übermensch* – not to mention the Americanising of yoga and 'occult' methods, promoted as a simple means to develop 'willpower', to gain health, to become successful, and so on. Clearly, all these by-products are inferior and not superior to ordinary positive religion. In my critique, I remarked that: 'A right certainly exists to access a truth superior to the one espoused by positive, exoteric and devotional religions' (and this, of course, was the truth pursued by the authors I had focused on). Yet, such a right 'is an aristocratic right, the one and only right plebeians will never manage to usurp, either today or at any other time', for such a right depends on 'absolute overcoming'. The vast majority of individuals – I suggested – ought to acknowledge their limits with regard to those horizons which stretch beyond the materialist view of the world; hence, they ought to prove capable of 'serenely shutting the many doors which are diabolically opening above and below their eyes.' 'Personality today is generally something to be achieved, something which is normally not possessed by the individual – so that it is useless to strive for what transcends it.' As my book addressed a wide readership, this is a point I felt needed to be made.

One of the chapters of *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism*, which appeared halfway through the book, must have come to many readers as a surprise: in this chapter, entitled 'The Return to Catholicism', I praised certain aspects of Catholicism for the first time in my career. I distinguished two kinds of contemporary 'returns to Catholicism'. The first kind was that of losers, of individuals who embrace Catholicism as a solid and everlasting religious system after having painfully failed to find a different path. Such cases – I argued – 'arise from the mere sentimental need to free oneself from an intolerable burden: to find a new form of authority which might bring the uncertainty of one's spiritual search to an end and provide some satisfaction.'

In similar cases, the objective significance and intrinsic value of the Catholic tradition only marginally came into play: had a different tradition with the same traits of solidity and authority been available, and provided similar means to obtain grace, it would have served the same purpose. As far as my work was concerned, these instances of a return to Catholicism were of little interest, as they were of a regressive, escapist sort.

On the other hand, by developing some of René Guénon's ideas, I also came to consider an opposite instance. Guénon had discussed the idea of the internal and transcendent unity of all major positive religions, which he interpreted as various adaptations of a single supernatural doctrine conditioned by the specific character of given peoples, geographical areas and historical periods. On such grounds, Guénon distinguished exotericism from esotericism. Exotericism consists of that which specifically pertains to a given tradition in its defined context, and which is shared by the common people. Esotericism, by contrast, pertains to that inner path by means of which a given tradition is in touch with Tradition on a super-devotional, intellectual and metaphysical level. It is only on this level that it is possible to understand the substantial identity of the different symbols, rites and experiences present in 'exoterically' separate traditions. Differentiation depends on the extent to which such an identity is perceived.

What was new in this book was my willingness to acknowledge the 'traditional' side of Catholicism. Nevertheless, I could not avoid expressing certain reservations. Firstly, I maintained that Catholicism ought to be distinguished from primitive Christianity, and that the latter is to be held in lesser esteem. In other books of mine (including *Revolt*), I was later to emphasise the negative, problematic aspects of Christianity from a historical perspective – which is to say: those aspects of Christianity antithetical to the Classical and Roman worldview. On the other hand, I acknowledge the fact that primitive Christianity potentially provided a desperate, tragic path of salvation for both the mass of outcasts devoid of any tradition who originally embraced the Christian message, and, more generally, for a specific human type. 'The idea of a choice to be made once and for all in this life between eternal salvation and eternal damnation – an idea conveyed all the more exasperatingly by resorting to frightening descriptions of the afterlife and of the Final Judgment . . . was a way to fill certain individuals with an extreme tension which, combined with a predisposition to the supernatural, might yield certain fruits' – if not in the course of one's life, then perhaps on the death bed or after death.

As for Catholicism, I viewed it as the product of imponderable 'providential' forces, which had rectified primitive Christianity and given birth to a new structure possessing certain 'traditional' features – I here referred to the positive, hierarchical character of Catholicism, with its rituals, symbols, myths and even dogmas. In this respect, and in abstract terms, Catholicism appeared to me as a specific manifestation of Tradition that might be further integrated, both metaphysically and intellectually, beyond the merely religious level. It is in this context that I discussed the second possible instance for a return to Catholicism: a return representing something other than a regressive failing. In this second instance, Catholicism is perceived not as a point of arrival, but as a starting point; while the actual nature of Catholicism today – its increasingly debased character and its lack of a solid 'inner doctrine' – are ignored. The conclusion of my necessarily limited enquiry ran as follows: 'In the case of worthy people, of unbroken individuals, a return to Catholicism can play a positive role as the first step along a path that must necessarily lead beyond Catholicism proper, towards a tradition which is truly universal, unanimous and perennial, where faith becomes self-realisation; symbolism becomes awakening; rites and sacraments become power and action; and dogma becomes the symbolic expression of an absolute and infallible knowledge, a non-human knowledge of the kind possessed by "heroes" and "ascetics" – those who have broken free of terrestrial bonds.'

This higher path, of course, posed a number of problems. First of all, it implied either a 'correction', or the complete exclusion of most of the specifically Christian features of Catholicism: for the idea of the uniqueness, exclusivity and intrinsic superiority of Christianity had to be rejected, along with the myth of the historic Christ as the 'son of God' come to expiate sins and redeem humanity – a figure quite different from both that of the founders of all other religions, and that of the divine 'avatar'. The only essential feature of Christian doctrine for those following this higher path, I argued, ought to be the symbolic and esoteric dimension of Catholicism. The intellectual and metaphysical aspects of the religion must here replace the sentimental and devotional aspects – although the latter, as the original components of Christianity, necessarily remain the irreducible ground of Catholicism.

On the other hand, I was willing to acknowledge the fact that '"Catholicism" can play a positive role in a context where so much deviant "Spiritualist" hotchpotch is to be found.' I argued that 'I – the author of *Pagan Imperialism* – certainly regard it as a positive matter when individuals who have known nothing but the idle speculation of profane philosophy, of plebeian academic culture, of contemporary individualist and romantic thought, choose to "convert" to Catholicism, thus giving proof of a greater inner seriousness. This is at least something. Faith and obedience – in the virile, heroic and sacrificial rather than sentimental, passive and feminine sense – are a step far greater and far more difficult to take than that of subscribing to all the "assertions" of base individualism.'

The above words reflect the kind of anti-secular approach – an approach distant from vulgar anticlericalism – which I have always personally favoured. After all, on a personal level, I have always held even the most humble and uncultivated of Catholic priests in greater esteem than any famous representative of modern 'culture' and thought (including the modern exponents of particular brands of pseudo-Catholic philosophy).

Guénon had already defined the issue of the 'traditionalist' integration of Catholicism on both a personal and a general level, and had conceived of such an integration as the necessary precondition for a rebirth of the West (this is in his book *La crise du monde moderne*[18]). As was to be expected, Guénon's suggestions were ignored by the Catholic authorities. Guénon argued that 'the fact that the contemporary spokesmen of the Catholic Church show such little understanding of their own doctrine does not justify one's own ignorance.' And yet, Guénon's words had little impact: for those who indeed do understand 'something more' about Catholic doctrine are seen as outsiders.

On this account, I argued, the positive path for a return to Catholicism is only open to a few individuals. Such individuals necessarily ought to possess uncommon qualifications; however, they cannot rely on any form of external support: on the contrary, in adopting and regularly practicing Catholicism, they must be wary of not being overcome by the 'psychic' current which characterises the concrete manifestations of Catholic religion. For what is described as the 'mystical body of Christ' now represents a collective psychic current which operates less on a supernatural and transcendent level than on a binding level, capable of halting all progress towards higher goals.

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[18] Originally published in 1927, it has been published in English as *The Crisis of the Modern World* (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001). It is widely regarded as Guénon's most fundamental work.

I might briefly mention here the fact that, in the 1930s, I personally ventured to explore Catholicism by spending some time among those monastic Orders which most eminently embody the ascetic and contemplative side of Catholicism: the Carthusians[19] (whose headquarters I visited), the Carmelites,[20] and the Benedictine followers of the old Rule.[21] I lived the same life as the monks and got in touch with *patres* responsible for the spiritual education of the novices. I even gathered further information among the Cistercians of Heiligenkreuz,[22] in Austria. But, in all such cases, I found little or no trace of the higher, intellectual aspects of the contemplative tradition: for these monastic orders were rather based on an exaggerated development of the liturgical and devotional side of Catholicism. Besides, the 'psychical' atmosphere of these monasteries struck me as being far from advantageous, even for a secret, personal work of metaphysical self-realisation in a Catholic framework. As for the character of official Catholicism today – a parochial, moralistic, socialistic, politicising, and frankly paternalistic Catholicism which abhors all 'medieval-isms' in its attempt to prove itself up-to-date – there is little to be said.

To return to *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism*, I should then point out that my acknowledgement of the 'traditional' aspects of Catholicism in the book was limited to the specific context of those problems I was discussing (the defence of personality, the dangers of 'Spiritualism', the true meaning of the term 'supernatural'). Moreover, as I already mentioned, I was discussing the validity of Catholicism from an abstract, doctrinal perspective: this did not affect my own understanding of the historical role played by Catholicism in the West as the heir to Christianity – a contrasting role to that of a regal and active (rather than priestly and contemplative) spirituality. I was to further define these ideas, partly in contrast to those of Guénon, in my main historical study of the morphology of civilisations.

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[19] The Carthusian Order, or Order of St. Bruno, dates to 1084. Carthusians follow their own particular Rule. Their headquarters is the monastery Grand Chartreuse, located in the Chartreuse mountains near Grenoble, France.

[20] The Carmelites, or the Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, were established at Mount Carmel (today in Israel) in the Twelfth century. They have their own Rule, which focuses on the importance of contemplative prayer.

[21] The Order of St. Benedict was established in Italy during the Sixth century. In modern times, the Benedictines are the most widespread and influential Christian monastic order. It is distinctive in that no central authority of their Order is recognized; rather, each Benedictine community remains autonomous.

[22] The Order of Cistercians, or the White Monks, were established in France in the Twelfth century. The Cistercians have attempted to practice the Rule of St. Benedict in its original form, free of later innovations. The Heiligenkreuz Abbey is the oldest continuously-operating Cistercian monastery in the world. In the Nineteenth century, a theological institute was added to the Abbey, and today is where many German-speaking priests receive their training.

The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism (a third, revised edition of which was published in 1971, with the inclusion of additional material such as one chapter on 'Satanism') aimed at providing certain guidelines by means of an objective critique of neo-spiritualism. The purpose of the book was also that of elucidating the true nature of the views I advocated, which were neither 'Theosophical' nor 'occultist' nor 'Masonic'. And yet, the publication of the book did not really make any difference. The spokesmen of profane culture had no conception of such crucial distinctions: for all matters situated outside the field of their 'dumb intelligence' – to quote Schuon – they perceived as shrouded in the darkness of a night where all cows are black. On the other hand, *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* contributed to elicit the enmity of an opposite category of people: that of Theosophists, Anthroposophists, and Spiritualists – whose many errors, distortions and digressions I had severely criticised in my book. No doubt, these new enemies of mine were not capable of comprehending my criticism: because of their intellectual level, they inevitably perceived any discussion based on a serious cultural and critical apparatus as something both impenetrable and annoying – for, in the attempt to satisfy their sentimental urges and their taste for the uncommon and the 'occult', such people had grown accustomed to the popularisation and debasement of certain subjects. The correct way to approach spirituality – by avoiding Spiritualist digressions and the conventional chattering of official culture, while at the same time retaining the serious and objective methods of enquiry employed by the latter – was not quite as attractive a path for most people. It is precisely for this reason that my books on the aforementioned subjects found only a limited readership. Nevertheless, I chose to continue with my task – a task that has known few precedents, indeed.

'REVOLT AGAINST THE MODERN WORLD' AND THE MYSTERY OF THE GRAIL

After *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism,* I wrote what is, perhaps, my most important work: *Revolt Against the Modern World.* A first edition of the book was published by Hoepli in 1934, a second by Bocca in 1951, and a third by Edizioni Mediterranee in 1970. The title of the work is not reflective of its content: for *Revolt* is not a polemical pamphlet (polemics and 'revolt' rather following implicitly, as consequences), but a study of the morphology of civilisation and history. The starting point of the book is a denunciation of the regressive character of the modern world and of modern civilisation. What distinguishes my own denunciation in *Revolt* from that of other authors, both past and present, who voiced similar ideas, often invoking some kind of reaction or reconstruction, is my specific attempt to provide a broader perspective, and to emphasise those points of reference which contribute to shed light on the true nature of the modern world and the extent of its crisis. With the exception of Guénon, all authors of some renown who discussed similar matters in recent times – not to mention all those 'protesting' youths inspired by Herbert Marcuse[1] – lacked any such frame of reference.

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[1] Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) was a German Marxist intellectual who was part of the Frankfurt School. In 1964 he published his most influential work, *One Dimensional Man,* which was a critique of both capitalism and Soviet-style Communism. In it, he argued that advanced industrial civilisations reduce individuals to consumers, conditioning them into desiring false needs through mass media and propaganda. He believed that the only path to true freedom lay in an individual's 'great refusal' of the ideas and products of present-day

Firstly, in *Revolt*, I emphasised how all those ideological tendencies that arose from the ingenuous optimism of the age of progress, which now constitute a cause for alarm and have been made the object of various reactions, are simply the product of the final phase in a vast process of general devolution. Most of the aforementioned contemporary authors have shown themselves to be unaware of the previous phases in this degenerative process, which they actually regard as positive steps and 'achievements'. I here remarked that 'one is often sick for a long time with an illness that only clearly breaks out after it has wrought its damage.' In order to define the various stages in this process of devolution and explain their interconnection, I resorted less to my own explanations than to traditional doctrines, which I explored and adapted. In particular, I referred to the doctrine of four ages and to that of caste regression.

My analysis of the modern world was articulated by means of a definition of its opposite: the 'world of Tradition' (where the word 'Tradition' is to be understood in the sense I previously described). Historical circumstances aside, in morphological terms I defined the 'modern world' and the 'world of Tradition' as 'two general, *a priori* categories of civilisation' – a description which applies equally well to the notions of 'modern world' and of 'man of Tradition'. In contrast to Spengler, I spoke of civilisations not in terms of plurality (or, less still, of relativity), but of duality. I also emphasised the consistency of traditional civilisations, all aspects of which are essentially linked to underlying principles.

The first section of *Revolt* provides 'an approach to the categories of the traditional spirit'. I here outlined 'the underlying principles in the life of the man of Tradition'; I explained that: 'The term "category" is here used to describe any *a priori* normative principle. Specific forms and meanings, therefore, ought not be regarded as separate objects, but rather as ideas which determine and shape reality and life, and which possess a value in themselves insofar as their concrete embodiment – something necessarily far from perfect – can be determined.' In other words, what I sought to examine here were basic ideals, either implicitly or explicitly expressed in given historical

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society. His ideas became very influential in the international New Left of the 1960s and '70s. The leader of the neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement), Giorgio Almirante, once famously remarked that Evola was 'our Marcuse – only better.'

circumstances: ideals of a normative and supra-historical character. By the use of comparisons, I sought to elucidate or supplement various examples – an operation not unlike the mathematical passage from differential to integral calculus.

I identified the foundation of the world of Tradition with the doctrine of two natures, a doctrine based on the notion of the existence of two opposing orders: a physical order and a metaphysical. The latter order represents the superior realm of 'being' opposed to the lower realm of becoming and of history: an immortal nature opposed to the perishable. The man of Tradition does not perceive this doctrine as merely a 'theory', but rather as a directly verifiable existential truth. Each traditional civilisation is thus characterised by an attempt to lead man from the lower order of reality to the higher, along various stages of approximation, participation and effective realisation.

Originally, at the centre of each traditional civilisation, stood 'immanent transcendence': the concrete presence of a non-human transcendent force embodied in higher beings possessing the highest authority. Perhaps the chief expressions of this idea are ancient forms of divine kingship. The most common means of passing from the lower nature to the higher has always been initiation. Contemplation and heroic action represent two great paths based on an approximation to the higher order; loyalty and ritual, two means of sharing in such an order. The higher order of reality has always found a support in traditional law, with its objective and supra-personal character, and has symbolically been expressed by the traditional state or empire: a worldly and historical reflection of that which transcends the world. Such, then, are the foundations of traditional hierarchies and civilisations.

In the first section of *Revolt*, on the basis of a comparative and integrative study of data gathered from a number of written ancient sources, both Eastern and Western, I defined the aforementioned concepts as the 'constants' or 'unchanging factors' of the world of Tradition. I further outlined the traditional understanding of issues such as: jurisprudence and law; ritual, war and victory; property, space and time; art and games; the relation between the warrior caste and the priestly caste; the relation between the sexes; race, ascesis, the afterlife and immortality. These many and diverse issues, I emphasised, were all underlined by a single spirit.

The second section of the book, which is entitled 'Genesis and Face of the Modern World', provides a traditionalist investigation of history, beginning from human origins, myth and prehistory. I here contrasted the modern superstition of evolutionism with the traditional idea of regression and devolution: the idea of a process of alienation from that which transcends the world, a severing of the existing links with the transcendent, leading to the predominance of all that is merely human and, ultimately, material and physical. The aforementioned doctrine of four – which, as I illustrated in the book, is common to both the East and the ancient West (cf. Hesiod) – proided the key to objectively define the various stages in the process of descent, for the modern world can be seen to correspond to the final age: the Iron Age of Hesiod,[2] the *kali-yuga* (or dark age) of the Hindus,[3] the wolf age of the *Eddas*.[4]

I do not wish to dwell on the subject in any detail here. However, it is worth mentioning that, for the purposes of my general historical investigation, I also came to embrace the idea of the gradual collapse of a primordial, Hyperborean tradition. Such collapse, I argued, had manifested itself in the clash between a Urano-virile civilisation and the telluric, lunar civilisation of the Mothers, and had been recorded in heroic mythical cycles (where the expressions 'hero' and 'generation of heroes' are to be understood in the Hesiodean sense, as describing specific attempts at restoring the Golden Age.

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[2] The last age, or Fifth Age, of Hesiod is the Iron Age, which he describes as the age of everyone against everyone, all social contracts are forgotten, the bad are thought to be good, and the gods forsake humanity. Hesiod believed that he was already living in the Fifth Age.

[3] The *kali-yuga* is described in the Twelfth Canto of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* as the last of the four *yugas*, or ages, of the world. This age is marked by humans forgetting the world of the spirit and only perceiving the inferior material world; physical degeneration; addiction; rulers will become unjust and forget the gods; murder, deceit and promiscuity will become commonplace; and disrespect for nature, among other characteristics. Most (but not all) present-day Hindu thinkers believe that we have been in the *kali-yuga* for thousands of years, and that it still has many centuries to run. The most widely used English version is the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* with translation and commentary by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972).

[4] The wolf age is described in the 45th verse of the *Völuspá*, or *Prophecy of the Seeress*, the first poem of the Norse *Poetic Edda*. The wolf age is said to be the age of brother turning against brother, constant warfare, widespread whoredom and hardship. It is the prelude to the end of the world, although the world is destined to be recreated afterward in an even more perfect form. See *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

The evidence provided by such cycles proved central to my own analysis). In relation to the Hyperborean tradition, I also referred to the migration of the Nordo-Atlantic or 'Aryan' races, which gave birth to the first Indo-European civilisations. This being the basic framework of *Revolt*, in a series of chapters I then sought to provide an outline of various civilisations: the Far Eastern, the Hindu, the Native American, the Egyptian, the Hebrew, and the Hellenic. Naturally, in order for my treatment of these ancient civilisations to have proven adequate, a separate book would have been necessary, in which – on the basis of a new range of material – I might have developed the general interpretative lines I had defined in each of those short chapters of *Revolt*. I devoted particular attention to the ancient civilisation of Rome, which I described as an attempt to impose a Urano-virile civilisation in a world where the opposite kind of civilisation had prevailed (almost, therefore, as a 'heroic rebirth'). As for Christianity, I continued to regard it as a setback for the Roman and Western tradition.

I identified a partial rebirth of the virile tradition in the Holy Roman Empire and in Medieval Ghibellinism: attempts to overcome the rift engendered by the predominance of the alien religion of Christianity in the West, even among those Germanic peoples who had embraced the symbolism of Rome. With the end of the Medieval world and the dawn of Humanism, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the rise of nation states, regressive and destructive elements gained the upper hand; this provided the foundations for the 'modern world': a process which no reaction or attempt at rectification managed to prevent. The centuries that followed witnessed the general secularisation of human existence, as well as the affirmation of individualism and rationalism – and, later, of collectivism, materialism and mechanism: a process culminating in the embrace of influences deriving no longer from what lies beyond man, but from what lies below him. Such elements, I argued in *Revolt*, have come to determine the form, interests and sinister power of a global civilisation which is speedily progressing towards the end of a great cycle – an event far grander than Spengler's 'decline of the West'.[5]

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[5] Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) was a German philosopher who is regarded as one of the principal Conservative Revolutionary figures of the Weimar period in Germany. His most important work was his two volume 1922/23 book, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926/28), in which he theorised that all civilisations go through an inevitable cycle of ages of rise and decline in power, with the present age, which has been dominated

In order to illustrate this vast process of degeneration, particularly in its political and social aspects, I referred to the aforementioned law of caste regression. Significantly, other authors had referred to this same law in the years when I was writing *Revolt*, both simultaneously and independently from one another. On the other hand, the law of caste regression was clearly related to the doctrine of four ages. Such a law is best explained on the basis of an intrinsically valid teaching espoused in a more or less explicit, complete and regular form among most traditional civilisations. According to such teachings, human society is structured in four 'functional classes' or castes, which correspond to definite and differentiated ways of being; each caste possesses its own character, ethics, rights and duties within the broader framework of Tradition. The highest caste is comprised of those individuals who embody spiritual authority; the second of the warrior aristocracy; the third of the property-owning bourgeoisie; the fourth of servants.

History is clearly marked by the progressive descent of civilisation, power and values from the level of the highest caste to that of the lowest. With the end of those systems based on pure spiritual authority ('sacral civilisations' ruled by 'divine kings'), authority fell into the hands of the warrior aristocracy: here began the cycle of great monarchies – the 'divine right' of the sovereign representing the residual echo of a former sacred dignity. The bourgeois revolution, democracy, capitalism and industrialism then contributed to transfer power into the hands of the representatives of the third caste, that of the wealthy – such transferral radically altering the character of the civilisation and the nature of its interests. In the present day, socialism, Marxism and Communism are foreshadowing – and have already partly brought about – the final phase: the advent of the fourth caste, that of servants. Servants ('workers' and proletarians) are here seen to organise themselves in an attempt to gain power and to conquer the world, leaving their imprint on all aspects of life, leading the historical process of regression to its close.

The final chapter of *Revolt* bears the title 'The End of the Cycle: Russia and America'. My remarks here were almost prophetic, particularly considering the fact that I had first published the book in 1934, and that I had already voiced the ideas expressed in this final chapter at an earlier date, as a paper

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by the West, currently entering its declining period. Spengler's thesis bears some similarity to traditional doctrines, but, as Spengler was a Nietzschean, he did not view his theoretical cycle as being the result of a transcendent, metaphysical reality.

later published in *New Anthology (Nuova Antologia)*. I portrayed the 'civilisations' of Communist Russia and of America as the two jaws of a single set of pliers closing upon Europe, seeking to destroy what remained of traditional forms and values: precisely the thing that was destined to happen. I emphasised the traits common to the two opposing world powers – particularly the destructive role they shared. On the other hand, it was clear to me that, behind the clash between America and Russia, lay the contrast between a bourgeois civilisation of the third caste and a civilisation of the fourth caste, embodying the final stage in the regressive process. But aside from any secondary, contingent and episodic use of the theory of caste regression, such a theory served to elucidate world history in a number of other ways. Besides, Marxist historiography has made use of a similar – if less refined and less articulate – scheme; naturally, it has done so by inversion: by describing what possesses a subversive, regressive and destructive character as an achievement and a sign of progress. A similar inverted perspective, of course, necessarily represents the 'correct' perspective in the eyes of the human being, which existentially corresponds to the fourth caste, and whose advent characterises the final age, signalling the end of the Hindu 'dark age' and of Hesiod's 'Iron Age'.

Clearly, given my understanding of the origins and nature of the modern world, I could not lightheartedly raise a call for reaction. In *Revolt*, I wrote that: 'The only individuals who can truly have faith in the future are those who adopt a conditioned perspective, thus manifesting signs of the very ills they wish to fight. By contrast, those individuals who possess the spirit and character that marks each normal, traditional civilisation, and who are aware of the roots of modern ills, cannot fail to acknowledge the fact that a titanic, non-human endeavour is necessary, not only to return, but merely to draw near to a normal kind of order. Such individuals cannot view the future in the same way as others.' These words of mine applied to the idea of a return to Tradition as a broad and universal phenomenon – something other than the privileged prerogative of an elite few, removed from the prevailing historical forces. I could envisage no concrete means, however, to accomplish such a return to Tradition. Given the overall perspective of *Revolt*, the book also appeared to be lacking the same faith in Catholicism as a positive point of reference that marked the work of other traditionalist authors. As I previously mentioned, Guénon had argued that the Catholic Church had provided

Europe with a traditional order, and that a return to traditional Catholicism – as I already mentioned with regard to *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* – constituted the only means for a rebirth of the West and an overcoming of the crisis of the modern world. Consequently, Guénon had directed a more or less explicit appeal to the representatives of the Catholic tradition (in the letters we privately exchanged, however, Guénon had confessed that while he had felt obliged to launch such an appeal, he had also predicted its failure).[6]

As I stated in the conclusion to *Revolt*, I could not agree with Guénon on this point. Catholicism, I argued, had failed to give proof of any restraining or creative power even in the past, when material and intellectual conditions were far more favourable. Rather, Catholicism was one of the factors which contributed to the dissolution of the West: for Catholicism had caused a disastrous fracture by stripping spirituality of virility and advocating the supremacy of priestly holiness in place of primordial synthesis and centrality, thus favouring the secularisation and deconsecration of the world of action and virility. Naturally, *Revolt* did not emphasise those aspects of Catholicism which *The Mask and Face of Contemporary Spiritualism* had praised from a purely doctrinal or esoteric perspective. In my conclusion to the second edition of *Revolt*, following an evaluation of certain new experiences, I argued that: 'Those individuals who today consider themselves to be men of Tradition on the simple grounds of their adherence to Catholicism are stopping midway, for they show no awareness of the series of causes, and of the world of origins and absolute values.'

From the first edition of *Revolt*, published in 1934, I implied that all that can be expected is the completion of the present cycle. Nevertheless, in the book I also discussed those movements that, both in Germany and in Italy, might, in a way, be seen as attempting to externally stem the tide of dissolution by opposing democracy and socialism, Bolshevism and the United States – an opposition accompanied by a revival of the symbols of the ancient Roman or Nordic tradition. Yet I asked: 'To what extent can such revivals be seen to express positive values from a higher point of view? To what extent does the use of certain symbols truly evoke a genuine spiritual tradition, something which transcends what is materially, ethnically and politically conditioned? And to what extent, instead, does the use of such symbols merely serve as an instrument for political forces operating within the limited framework of the modern idea of nation, forces whose highest ambition is power, understood in the secular, illusionary sense prevalent in this final age?' In *Revolt*, I repeatedly emphasised the more ambiguous aspects of these political movements, and pointed to the fact that the contemporary world threatens to distort and misdirect the use of symbols and ideas pertaining to a higher order. Again, I was not mistaken in my prediction; and, in the misuse of certain symbols and ideas, I identified one of the aspects of what I termed the 'occult war': a means to discredit and halt the progress of what might serve as a means towards a genuine restoration.

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[6] Guénon, in his 1927 book, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, expressed his opinion that the Catholic Church was still the ideal vehicle for a reintegration of Tradition into the West, provided that the Church completely rejected the influences of modernity and returned to a more traditional condition, and disregarded modern politics. However, he also said that: 'Indeed it may be said that in the present state of things, Catholicism has no more than a virtual existence since we do not see in it any real consciousness of universality.' (From *The Crisis of the Modern World* [Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001], pp. 111-112.) Such statements, plus his advice in the same book that the Church should attempt to learn from the example of the Eastern traditions, caused most Catholic thinkers to turn against him.

When I first published *Revolt*, I believed it might be possible to reinforce the positive elements present in the aforementioned political movements, and to separate such elements from the more negative and problematic features. If I pursued this contingent goal as best I could, this was partly due to my *kshatriya* disposition, which led me to do what had to be done without any concern for either success or failure. The ideas I expressed in *Revolt* provided the foundation and yardstick for any kind of action: by shunning all compromises, illusions and pretences, the book pointed to those values never to be forgotten.

I should here mention the nature of my engagement with movements of the Right, both in Italy and in Germany, up to the outbreak of the Second World War. First, however, for the sake of chronological order, I wish to briefly discuss another book of mine, which Laterza published in 1938 under the title of *The Mystery of the Grail and the Ghibelline Tradition of Empire* (*Il mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero*). The book developed out of an appendix contained in the first edition of *Revolt*, and its purpose is to prove the existence, in early medieval Europe, of a kind of spirituality that can be traced back to the regal strain of the Primordial Tradition. This spirituality was chiefly expressed symbolically in the literature of chivalry, as well as by means of the figures, myths and sagas of the 'imperial cycle'.[7] My study of this field proved the usefulness of the 'traditionalist method' of enquiry: a method based on integrative comparisons aimed at defining basic values.

The ordinary reader today knows about the Grail thanks only to Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, which, in its Romantic approach, really deforms and twists the whole myth.[8] Equally misleading is the attempt to interpret the mystery of the Grail in Christian terms: for Christian elements only play an accessory, secondary and concealing role in the saga. In order to grasp the true significance of the myth, it is necessary instead to consider the more immediate points of reference represented by the themes and echoes pertaining to the cycle of King Arthur, which survives in the Celtic and Nordic traditions. The Grail essentially embodies the source of a transcendent and immortalising power of primordial origin that has been preserved after the 'Fall', degeneration and decadence of humanity. Significantly, all sources agree that the guardians of the Grail are not priests, but are knights and warriors – besides, the very place where the Grail is kept is described not as a temple or church, but as a royal palace or castle.

In the book, I argued that the Grail can be seen to possess an initiatory (rather than vaguely mystical) character: that it embodies the mystery of warrior initiation. Most commonly, the sagas emphasise one additional element: the *duties* deriving from such initiation. The predestined Knight – he who has received the calling and has enjoyed a vision of the Grail, or received its boons – or he who has 'fought his way' to the Grail (as described in certain texts) must accomplish his duty of restoring legitimate power, lest he forever be damned. The Knight must either allow a prostrate, deceased, wounded or only apparently living King to regain his strength, or personally assume the regal role, thus restoring a fallen kingdom. The sagas usually attribute this function to the power of the Grail. A significant means to assess the dignity or intentions of the Knight is to 'ask the question': the question concerning the purpose of the Grail. In many cases, the posing of this crucial question coincides with the miracle of awakening, of healing or of restoration.

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[7] The imperial cycle refers to the legend of King Arthur. In *The Mystery of the Grail*, Evola refers to Sir Thomas Malory's *The Death of Arthur*, or *Le Morte D'Arthur*, as his primary source for the Arthurian saga.

[8] Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was the greatest German composer of operas in the Nineteenth century (although he preferred to call his mature works 'music dramas'). The influence of his music and writings had a tremendous impact on all aspects of culture in Europe, well into the Twentieth century (and even in the present day). *Parsifal* was the last of his music dramas, first performed at Bayreuth in 1882. Although Wagner did use Wolfram von Eschenbach's Thirteenth century *Parzifal* poem as the basis of the drama, he incorporated many other influences as well, including Schopenhauer and Buddhism. Such a syncretic approach, combining elements from several modern and traditional sources, no doubt did not appeal to Evola's traditional orientation.

Having determined this much in my study, I then ascribed the essential character of the Grail sagas to a precise historical moment: the imperial Middle Ages in Europe. I thus interpreted the Grail myth as a symbolic expression of the hopes and wishes of the Ghibelline faction to raise, reorganise and unify the West under a sacred *imperium* – what certain political theologians have termed the 'regal religion of Melchizedek'.[9] In a concealed fashion, the literature of chivalry expressed this Ghibelline drive toward an ideal, a drive shared by the major Swedish rulers (figures often shrouded in myth), as well as by those ascetic and warrior Orders of knights which, in a way, embodied the chivalrous ideals of the Grail, in more or less explicit contrast to the opposite spiritual pole of the Medieval world: the Church (whose attempts to gain supremacy found an expression in Guelph ideology). One of the major episodes in the opposition between these two poles was the tragic destruction of the Knights Templar.[10]

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[9] Melchizedek is a mysterious figure who is first mentioned in the *Book of Genesis*, when he brings bread and wine to Abraham to bless him after a battle. He is described as a King of Salem and a priest. The only other Biblical reference to him occurs in the *Book of Psalms*, when Jesus Christ is said to be 'a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek'. Since Jesus also served bread and wine at the Last Supper, and which he also established as the sacrament to be taken in his memory, Catholics have always seen this as proof of Jesus' messianic role in establishing his own teachings to supersede the Aaronic priesthood of the Jews. Since Melchizedek was both a priest and a king, he is seen by some as a symbol of an ideal unity between temporal and sacral authority in the Church, such as the Ghibellines desired, as opposed to the rule of the Pope alone.

[10] The Knights Templar was one of the most famous groups of the Crusading Knights. They were initially created in the Twelfth century as an Order tasked with protecting Christian pilgrims on pilgrimage to the recently-captured Temple Mount (Al Aqsa Masjid) in Jerusalem (Al Quds). They fought in many battles to protect Christian possession of the Holy Land (Palestine). They survived until the Fourteenth century, when the Church was pressured for political reasons to reject the Knights Templar, which was done, and the Order was forcibly and brutally dissolved. Some believe that the Knights discovered esoteric knowledge and sacred relics, including the Grail, in the Holy Land that were passed down secretly within their Order, and some even believe that this knowledge survives in secret today. The Freemasons, for example, include the Knights Templar as part of their lineage.

With the end of the Middle Ages, the tradition embodied in the aforementioned sagas disappeared; or rather, it survived underground. In my book, I described those groups which to some extent can be seen as heirs to the myth of the Grail. First and foremost among such groups is that of the Fedeli d'Amore[11] (which Dante[12] himself once belonged to): poets whose erotic language often possessed a symbolic and initiatory character – a fact that the work of Luigi Valli,[13] at the time of my enquiry, had contributed to disclose. Such poets belonged to a secret organisation (perhaps not unconnected with that of the Templars) of a Ghibelline bent, and decidedly opposed to the Church. The second tradition that preserved the Grail myth was the Hermetic, a tradition which continued to operate well beyond the crisis of the Middle Ages. To these two groups, I should add the Rosicrucians[14] (not to be confused with the various modern sects which have claimed that name for themselves). This mysterious brotherhood advocated a restoration of Europe and the rule of an *Imperator* who would bring all usurpations to an end; following the treaty of Westphalia,[15] which did away with what little authority the Holy Roman Empire still possessed, the Rosicrucians disappeared once more, staying in the shade (symbolically, it is said that the Rosicrucians 'left' Europe).

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[11] The Fedeli d'Amore, or 'Faithful of Love', was a mystical society of poets which existed in Italy of the Middle Ages. They wished to see a regeneration of society based on the ideals of chivalry, It derived its beliefs from a number of traditional sources. Poets typically petitioned for membership in the society by writing a poem addressed to the Fedeli d'Amore. The society maintained that members could only write about mystical experiences of their own, and members developed practices to attain such states of consciousness. Dante Alighieri is the most famous poet who was a member.

[12] Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is regarded as the greatest writer in the Italian language. He was the author of *The Divine Comedy*.

[13] Luigi Valli (1878-1931) was one of the members of the Ur Group, and published some of his writings on the subject under its auspices. His book about the Fedeli d'Amore is *The Secret Language of Dante and the 'Fedeli d'amore'* (*Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei 'Fedeli d'amore'* [Rome: Casa editrice 'Optima', 1928]). He said that he had deciphered a secret code used by the Fedeli d'Amore in the works of Dante, and that it revealed a secret doctrine told in symbols calling for the unity of priestly and temporal power. Valli was also frequently cited by Guénon. None of his writings have been translated. For a summary of his ideas, however, see 'Plain Theosophical Traces in Poetry', in *Theosophy*, vol. 21, No. 6, April 1933, pp. 247-253, available at *Blavatsky Net* (www.blavatsky.net/magazine/theosophy/ww/setting/poetry.html).

[14] The Rosicrucians were originally a secret mystical society which existed in Germany in the Seventeenth century (although it claimed to be several centuries older in origin). They also exerted influence upon the Freemasons.

[15] The treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648, and brought an end to the Thirty Years' War. It began as a war between Catholics and Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire,

This historical overview which I provided in *The Mystery of the Grail* supplemented what I had already written in *Revolt* concerning the Middle Ages. O.W. Barth published a German translation of the book in 1958, and a second Italian edition was published by Ceschina in 1962. These more recent editions contain some revised material, and a new final chapter on the origins and significance of Freemasonry as an 'inversion of Ghibellinism'. I here described Freemasonry as an organisation that had originally possessed an initiatory character, but which had grown increasingly political in nature, ultimately serving as the expression of forces contrary to Tradition and as one of the major secret agents of modern subversion (first in the years leading to the French Revolution, and then more decidedly following the bourgeois revolution). The chief point I sought to emphasise was that opposition to the Church and Catholicism, which Ghibellinism had voiced on the basis of an imperial claim to an equally sacred and transcendent form of authority, came to be articulated, in accordance with the aforementioned process of inversion, on the basis of Enlightenment ideals of secularisation and of the 'religion of Man' – ideals which sought to free humanity from any kind of authority (dismissed as 'tyranny' and 'obscurantism').

More generally, this process of inversion led to an attempt to invest human reason as such with the kind of rights and authority which are superior to ordinary religious dogmas and mythically 'revealed' truths, and which are the exclusive privilege of 'enlightened' individuals (i.e., initiates). Hence, the distortion of the term 'enlightenment', which became synonymous with destructive rational criticism. In such a way, I sought to supplement and clarify what I had previously written. The need for clarification of this kind can be grasped from the fact that, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the term 'Ghibelline' surfaced again in an exceedingly distorted manner, as a way to describe the affirmation of the secular and non-denominational state against clericalism. I again denounced the wrongful and equivocal use of the term in my book *Men Among the Ruins* (*Gli uomini e le rovine*).

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but grew to engulf most of Europe. One of the outcomes of the treaty was the granting of sovereignty to the rulers of the various Imperial States which comprised the Empire. Deprived of its governing authority, the Holy Roman Empire thereafter existed in name only.

As for the aforementioned involution of Freemasonry, I should mention the fact that thanks to an extraordinary set of circumstances, while living in Vienna, I came across some precious and rare material on the basis of which I intended to write a book entitled *The Secret History of Secret Societies* (*Storia segreta delle società segrete*). However, I never got the chance to accomplish this project.

MY WORK IN GERMANY AND THE 'DOCTRINE OF AWAKENING'

To return now to my attempt to influence mainstream politics in the years leading up to the Second World War, I should say that my publication of *Revolt* might indeed have been expected to provide the doctrinal basis for a serious, traditionalist Right of a revolutionary (or, more appropriately, counter-revolutionary) character. And yet, this was not the case: for *Revolt*, as a book, was largely ignored, on the grounds that the ideas and perspectives it emphasised were too far removed from the mentality of the Fascist leadership and of its followers (not to mention the mentality of the amateurish or academic intelligentsia which, thanks to its adherence to the Fascist regime, had come to control both Italian culture and the Italian press). The few attempts to develop a form of 'traditionalist' thought in those years were articulated in bourgeois and Catholic terms by the 'nationalist' elements which had adhered to Fascism. Such attempts were marked by a confined intellectual horizon and an unpleasantly sectarian spirit. Before the rise of the 'Axis', my work was limited to the publication of the aforementioned section in Farinacci's paper and of articles, essays and reviews that only interested a select public. It would be pure fantasy, therefore, to suggest, as some French writers have recently done, that I was 'Mussolini's advisor'

(W. Gerson[1]) or even the 'éminence grise[2] behind the Duce' (E. Antébi[3]). In fact, I only personally met Mussoini in 1942, at the time when Fascism (as I shall discuss later) first embraced 'racism'. Other writers are instead correct in observing that I argued in favour of an 'esoteric' approach to Romanness and to the symbols of Rome – although, as I already mentioned when discussing *Pagan Imperialism,* my suggestions in this respect were largely ignored.

The reception of my work was rather different in Germany, on account of the presence in that country of different cultural milieus and of different historical precedents. Whereas Italy had lost almost all traces of its hierarchical civilisation and society, Germany – and, more generally, central Europe – had preserved certain aspects of its former tradition, so that forces from its former political regimes were still partly in control of politics and society. Aside from the Prussian tradition, with its power to shape society, in Germany there existed a nobility which still held many political, military, bureaucratic and diplomatic positions, and which (as Junker) controlled the land and (to a lesser extent) the industry. In the aftermath of the First World War, Germany had also witnessed the birth of an intellectual current – composed of writers such as Möller van den Bruck,[4] H.

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[1] Werner Gerson was the pen name of French author Pierre Mariel, who made this assertion in his book, *Nazism, Secret Society* (*Le Nazisme, société secrète:* Paris: Productions de Paris, 1969). It remains untranslated. It is worth noting that Gerson's book is only one in a series of such books and essays, which continue to appear today, which make unsubstantiated claims that Evola was an occult advisor to Mussolini, or Hitler, or both.

[2] French: 'gray eminence'. The term refers to any advisor to a powerful figure who remains hidden.

[3] Elisabeth Antébi made this accusation in her book *[With Lucifer (Avec Lucifer* [Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1970]).

[4] Arthur Möller van den Bruck (1876-1925) was one of the principal authors of the German Conservative Revolution. He is best known for his 1923 book, *The Third Reich* – translated as *Germany's Third Empire* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1934). A follower of Nietzsche, he advocated the idea of a third German empire to replace the Weimar Republic which would embody a synthesis between socialism and nationalism and provide for the needs of all citizens, but within a hierarchical framework based on traditional values. Despite Hitler's appropriation of his book's title, he rejected National Socialism for its anti-intellectual nature in a note he left just prior to his suicide.

Blüher,[5] E. Jünger[6] and von Salomon[7] – which voiced the combative values of monarchist loyalism. Such a current was described as that of the 'Conservative Revolution'.[8] When National Socialism gained power, part of the

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[5] Hans Blüher (1888-1955) was a German psychologist who was part of the German Wandervögel and the 'men's movement', as were Otto Weininger and Stefan George. He favoured a male-dominated approach to history and politics. He postulated that sexuality is an abstraction, while Eros, or desire, is the only reality, and is the force which leads to the existence of culture. He said that this view discredited the notion that homosexuality is against nature, and also abrogated the bourgeois, feminine concept of the family, which he identified with the Semites, and which he felt was opposed to the masculine, Aryan conception. The Nazis banned his work. Evola cites Blüher in his own works. Francis Parker Yockey also translated Blüher into English, although the translation is lost. There is a translation of *Family and Male Fraternity: A Theory of the Eros* (Paris: Dioscures, 1994).

[6] Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) was one of the most prominent of the German Conservative Revolutionaries, but that was only one phase in a long and varied career. He volunteered for and fought in the German Army throughout the First World War, and was awarded the highest decoration, the Pour le Mérite, for his service. After the war, he wrote many books and novels, was active in German politics, experimented with psychedelic drugs, and travelled the world. He remained ambivalent about National Socialism at first, but never joined the Party, and he had turned against the Nazis by the late 1930s. He rejoined the Wehrmacht at the outbreak of war, however, and remained in Paris as a captain, where he spent more time with Picasso and Cocteau than enforcing the occupation. His objections to the Nazis were influential upon the members of the Stauffenberg plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944, which led to his dismissal from the Wehrmacht. After the war, Jünger's political views gradually moved toward a sort of aristocratic anarchism. Several of his books have been translated.

[7] Ernst von Salomon (1902-1972) was a German military cadet who joined the Freikorps in 1919 in order to counter the liberal aims of the Weimar Republic. He wrote books about his experiences which show a strong Conservative Revolutionary orientation. He assisted the assassins of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, who was a Jew, in 1922, an event which was hailed by the Nazis. After serving a prison sentence, however, von Salomon rejected National Socialism, and he became a screenwriter in Germany. He married a Jew and protected her throughout the Third Reich, and reportedly he rescued other Jews as well; nevertheless, he was imprisoned by the Allies after the war under accusation of having been a Nazi supporter. Several of his books are available in English.

[8] The Conservative Revolution is a term first coined by Hugo von Hoffmansthal, which has come to designate a loose confederation of anti-liberal German thinkers who wrote during the Weimar Republic. There was a great diversity of views within the ranks of the Conservative Revolutionaries, but in general they opposed both democratic capitalism and Communism in favor of a synthesis of the German (and especially Prussian) aristocratic traditions with socialism. Spengler advocated one form of this doctrine which he termed 'Prussian socialism'. The Conservative Revolutionaries opposed liberalism in all its forms, rejected a return to the Kaiser's Reich, and saw Germany as being culturally tilted more towards Russia

Conservative Revolutionary forces joined its ranks, becoming one of its central components – yet not without maintaining a certain distance from the more dubiously and dangerously populist, plebeian and fanatical aspects of Hitlerism. Given the unexpected success of Hitler's movement on a national and international level, it is only at a later and more critical period that Conservative Revolutionaries turned their reservations with respect to National Socialism into actual opposition to Hitler's regime. Formerly, Conservative Revolutionaries had adhered to National Socialism in the hope of seizing the right moment to intervene adequately in the provisional and imperfect basis of the National Socialist state of the Third Reich, which had, nevertheless, accomplished certain preliminary aims by vanquishing socialism, Communism and democracy, and by attempting to restore some of the ideals of the older German tradition.

As I previously mentioned, my name was already known in Germany at the time, particularly in Conservative Revolutionary circles, thanks to the German edition of *Pagan Imperialism* (which avoided the specific references to the Italian situation present in the original edition of the text). In 1934, I took my first journey north. I delivered one paper at a university conference in Berlin, and another at an international meeting on Nordic studies (the second *Nordisches Thing*,[9] organised by Roselius[10]) in Bremen; most importantly, I spoke before the small audience of the Herrenklub[11] of Berlin – the club of the conservative German nobility, well known for its influential role on a

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than towards France or Britain. They were the forerunners of the contemporary European New Right. The most comprehensive study of the Conservative Revolution in English is Klemens von Klemperer's *Germany's New Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), although the definitive book in any language is Armin Mohler's *The Conservative Revolution in Germany 1918-1932: A Handbook* (*Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932: Ein Handbuch* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972]).

[9] 'Nordic assembly'.

[10] Ludwig Roselius (1874-1943) was a German coffee magnate who is regarded as the inventor of commercial decaffeinated coffee. He was a corporatist and a racialist who supported National Socialism. He regarded industrialisation and Germany's defeat in the First World War as threats to Nordic values, calling for a return to the values of the Middle Ages, coupled with the best of modern science. None of his writings have been translated.

[11] 'Gentlemen's Club'. While this organization supported National Socialism, it also attempted to distance itself from some of the excesses of the Nazis in favour of a more aristocratic style of politics. Although the members hoped to influence National Socialist policy, they were ignored by the Party.

political level. In the Berlin Herrenklub, I found a most congenial environment, and I soon developed a genuine and prolific friendship with the club's president, Baron Heinrich von Gleichen.[12] The Herrenklub, which pursued aims similar to my own, represented an adequate milieu for the understanding and evaluation of my own ideas, and provided the basis for my own work in Germany.

In 1935, a renowned publishing group from Stuttgart, the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, published a German translation of *Revolt Against the Modern World*, thanks to which I soon became one of the most well-known European writers in Germany. Gottfried Benn[13] described the book as: 'A work the exceptional importance of which will become evident in the years to come. Those who read it will feel transformed, and will see Europe in a different light.' Another commentator wrote: 'Rather than being the chief work of Italy's Spengler, I would define *Revolt* as the landmark of aristocratic and traditionalist European thought.' Similarly, J. von Kempski[14] argued that: 'Clearly, what primordial, yet resplendent and far from nebulous, times evoke, according to this Italian writer, is the genuinely aristocratic world of a higher, austere spirituality which surpasses our obscure epoch, and spurs us on to the reconquest of a world and civilisation of unbroken men.' W. Stapel,[15] editor of the *German People (Deutsches Volkstum)* magazine, wrote that: 'Evola presents his ideas in a bewitching fashion. His book contains many a magical page.' According to F. Everling, a former monarchist deputy of the Reichstag and a man very close to Wilhelm II,[16] 'What is most enthralling in this book is the rigour with which ideas based on Indo-European prehistory lead to the path of the *Sacrum Imperium*.[17] To this, Evola adds the elegant style of his writing, ever well-informed and far from self-congratulatory: an uncommon and aristocratic trait.' Several other commentators judged the book in similar terms.

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[12] Baron Heinrich von Gleichen-Russwurm (1883-1959) was also a friend of Möller van den Bruck. The latter reproduced a letter from himself to the Baron by way of a preface to his own book, *The Third Reich*.

[13] Gottfried Benn (1886-1956) was a German author who was part of the Expressionist movement. After serving during the First World War, he came to dislike both Weimar democracy and Communism during the 1920s. By the early 1930s, he supported the National Socialists, and he briefly served as the head of the poetry section of the Prussian Academy of the Arts after the rise to power of the Nazis in 1933. He grew disenchanted with the Nazis after the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, however, and withdrew his support, choosing to join the Wehrmacht instead in 1935. As Expressionism became condemned by the Nazis as degenerate art, and Benn's politics were well-known, his work was finally banned in Germany in 1938. Several editions of his work are available in English.

[14] Jürgen von Kempski (1910-1998) was a German professor who wrote on philosophy, literature and politics. His work is untranslated.

[15] Wilhelm Stapel (1882-1954) was a German political journalist who is identified with the Conservative Revolution. He was a Protestant, a nationalist and an anti-Semite. He also studied with Edmund Husserl. He supported the National Socialists, and wrote several books on anti-Semitism, and the relationship of Nazism with Christianity. A small selection from his work is available in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Nothing of the kind was ever said of *Revolt* in the country where I happened to be born. As I already mentioned, 'official culture' in Italy has always ignored the book.

It is also worth mentioning here the way in which Germany made use of my work at the time. As a foreigner in an allied country, I enjoyed a kind of immunity: I could say things which would have been more or less unacceptable for a German to say under Nazi rule, and which would possibly have caused him to be interned in a concentration camp. I argued in favour of the rectification of the political movement that had recently come to power, of the strengthening of its positive elements and the curbing of its negative traits. As is generally known, the expression 'Third Reich' was not coined by Hitler, who rather borrowed it from the writers of the 'Conservative Revolution'. Such writers, however, had vested the expression with a spiritual and traditionalist meaning by referring to ideas not dissimilar to my own; hence, some of these writers, who later came to oppose Hitler's regime, perceived the Nazi use of the expression and of the symbolism of the Third Reich as a contaminating usurpation. By contrast, a secret front of the Right sought to gradually trace the idea back to its original significance: it is in this respect that my own work might have proven useful. In theory, some of the principles of National Socialism might have provided an adequate foundation; this was particularly the case with the *Ordensstaatsgedanke* or National Socialist idea of a state based not on a democratic 'leadership' but on an *Order* – an elite founded on an ideal, a tradition, an austere discipline and a common lifestyle. A specific issue that needed to be addressed was that of so-called 'racism': for the needs that had nourished such a tendency in Germany had to be addressed and rectified – and this represented a highly problematic endeavour. I will soon come to discuss the issue of 'racism' in more detail.

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[16] Wilhelm II (1859-1941) was the Kaiser of the German Empire from 1888 until he abdicated the throne following the collapse of Germany in November 1918. He remained in exile in the Netherlands for the remainder of his life, hoping in vain that the circumstances in Germany would eventually allow for a restoration of the monarchy.

[17] Latin: 'sacred empire'. The Holy Roman Empire was known as the *Sacrum Romanum Imperium*.

A rectification of National Socialism, then, is what informed my work in central Europe – work which took the form of the aforementioned publications, of papers and personal contacts – up to the Second World War. I here use the expression 'central Europe' because I also happen to have found a favourable milieu in Vienna, where I often came to spend the winter. In Vienna, I got in touch with the representatives of the Right and of the genuine Austrian aristocracy, as well as with the group headed by Othmar Spann (who followed a line similar to my own). I also worked with Prince K.A. Rohan, who had a vast network of personal contacts.

I then came to conceive a project that transcended the aforementioned milieus. My idea was that of coordinating the various elements which to some extent, in Europe, embodied traditionalist thought from a political and cultural perspective. With such an aim in mind, I took a few trips across the continent in 1936. In the course of one of these trips, in Rumania, I personally met Corneliu Codreanu,[18] the leader of the Rumanian Iron Guard:[19] one of the most worthy and spiritually-oriented individuals I ever met within the national political movements of that period. In Bucharest I also met Mircea Eliade,[20] who was destined to enjoy much renown after the War thanks to his numerous works on the history of religion. Eliade, with whom I remain in contact to this day, was politically close to Codreanu, and had also shown some interest in the activities of the 'Ur Group'.

The rise of the Axis ought to have represented a most favourable circumstance in my eyes, given that I had always hoped for a 'Ghibelline', integrative meeting of the Roman world with the Germanic (having long identified the 'myth of the two Eagles' as a possible starting point for the reconstruction of Europe). As for Italy, no tangible aim was ever met in this respect, for the dull cliques of official Italian culture systematically sabotaged any vibrant endeavour. Paradoxically, Italy even employed sectarian Catholics of attested anti-Germanic inclinations – such as Guido Manacorda[21] (the author of a book, *The Forest and the Temple [La selva e il tempio]*,[22] which presents an utterly distorted picture of the Germanic spirit). Such individuals were highly annoyed by the fact that someone like me, who had received no official 'authorisation', could be invited to conferences and meetings in Germany, and enjoy a certain degree of recognition in that country. On one occasion, an attempt was even made to prevent me from travelling by denying me a visa. Mussolini personally intervened on this occasion, after being informed of the plot.

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[18] Corneliu Codreanu (1899-1938) was originally a lawyer, who began agitating against democracy and Communism in the new Rumanian state after the First World War. After he became a threat to the existing regime, he was arrested and executed. Evola's essay about Codreanu, 'The Tragedy of the Rumanian Iron Guard: Codreanu', is available at ***Evola As He Is*** (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id15.html). Some of Codreanu's writings have been translated.

[19] The Iron Guard, or the Legion of the Archangel Michael, was a militant revolutionary group formed by Codreanu in 1927. It was strongly anti-democatic, anti-capitalist, anti-Communist, and anti-Semitic. It differed from other European Right wing movements of the period due to its spiritual basis, as the Iron Guard was deeply imbued with Rumanian Orthodox mysticism. They were in frequent conflict with the government until, in 1940, they were allowed to enter a new ruling coalition in the government, although their time in power lasted only four months until they were thrown out after trying to foment a coup against their coalition partners. During that time, however, they enacted harsh anti-Semitic measures throughout Rumania, and assassinated many of their opponents. The surviving leaders were given refuge in Germany, although the organization began to splinter in their absence. Since the war, several Rumanian political groups have claimed to be the heirs of the original Iron Guard.

[20] Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) did indeed support the Iron Guard for a brief time in the late 1930s, as he was impressed by the spiritual basis of the Guard's revolt, although he disagreed publicly with anti-Semitism. In 1956 he moved to the United States, where he remained as a Professor at the University of Chicago. He became one of the most prominent scholars of comparative religion of the Twentieth century (although he was not a traditionalist). He recounted his friendship with Evola in his journal when he learned of Evola's death, in an entry dated July 1974. It appears in *Journal III: 1970-1978* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 161-163.

These references of mine to a relatively exterior field of action ought not give the impression that I no longer paid any attention to traditional disciplines in those days. Before further describing my attempts to influence political forces, I ought to point out that, in the late 1930s, I focused on the writing of my two most important books on Eastern wisdom. On the one hand, I worked on a new edition of *Man as Potency*, which, as previously mentioned, I retitled *The Yoga of Power* (for practical reasons, and the circumstances which followed, however, this new edition of the book was only published by Bocca after the war). On the other hand, I composed a systematic work on original Buddhism: *The Doctrine of Awakening – A Study of Buddhist Ascesis* (*La dottrina del risveglio – Saggio sull'ascesi buddhista*). This book, too, was only published at a later date, in 1943, by Laterza.

In a way, by writing the latter book, I repaid my debt to Buddha's doctrine. I already mentioned how one of Buddha's teachings had crucially contributed to my overcoming of the personal crisis I had experienced in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. At a later date, I came to employ Buddhist texts daily, in a practical way, for purposes of self-realisation, as a means to develop a detached awareness of 'being'. He who had been the prince of the Śākyas[23] had described a series of inner disciplines that I perceived as being most congenial to myself – for I felt that devotional (and particularly Christian) ascesis was foreign to my own nature.

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[21] Guido Manacorda(1879-1956) was a writer and lecturer known for his anti-Americanism, as well as his anti-German attitudes. On page 256 of *Men Among the Ruins*, Evola describes a lecture by him in which he mocked the German concept of loyalty as depicted in Goethe's drama *Faust*, when Faust is about to be taken to Hell, considers escaping, but then decides not to when he remembers that he gave Satan his word. According to Evola, Manacorda's comment was, 'One of us Latins would have found a way to screw the devil too!', to which Evola comments, 'I have no doubt about that.' In spite of his anti-German prejudice, however, he did write extensively on Richard Wagner. He is untranslated.

[22] *La selva e il tempio* (Firenze: Bemporad, 1933). No English version exists.

In my study, I sought to emphasise the true nature of Buddhism, a doctrine which had undergone much distortion, both in most of its later forms – when, following its revelation and spread, Buddhism had turned into a religion – and in the perception of Buddhism prevalent in the West. In fact, I explained in the book, the essential nature of Buddhist doctrine was originally metaphysical and initiatory. The view of Buddhism as simply a kind of morality based on compassion, humanitarianism and a flight from life arising from the idea that 'life is pain' is most foreign, profane and superficial. Buddhism was rather born of a will to attain the unconditioned, a will that was radically affirmed by seeking to attain what transcends life and death. It is not so much 'pain' that Buddhism seeks to overcome, as the agitation and contingency implied by all conditioned existence, which has its origin, root and foundation in greed: a thirst which, by its very nature, cannot be extinguished by leading an ordinary life; an intoxication, or 'mania', a form of ignorance and attachment that leads towards the desperate, drunken and greedy identification of the 'I' with one or the other form of the perishable world in the eternal current of becoming (*samsāra*). The term *'nirvāna'* merely describes the negative task of extinction (the extinction of thirst and of metaphysical 'ignorance'). The positive counterpart of *nirvāna* is enlightenment or awakening (*bodhi*), from which the word 'Buddha' derives ('Buddha' being a title meaning 'The Awakened One' and not a name, as most people believe). It is for this reason that I chose to entitle my book *The Doctrine of Awakening*.

According to the historical Buddha, the doctrine of awakening was lost in the course of the centuries, having been obscured in India by ritual and by the presumptuous, fossilised speculation of the *brāhmana* caste. Buddha reaffirmed and renewed the doctrine, which he did not fail to inform with his own character: that of a member of the warrior rather than the *brāhmana* caste. The 'aristocratic' nature of Buddhism, which is permeated by a virile and warrior force – the roar of the Lion symbolising Buddha's message[24] –

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[23] Śākya was a kingdom in ancient India. According to Buddhist tradition, Śākya was a *kshatriya* clan, and Gautama Buddha was born a prince.

[24] The Buddha's discourses are described as a 'Lion's roar' in two discourses of the aforementioned *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Shorter Discourse on the Lion's Roar* and the *Great Discourse*

applied on an immaterial and atemporal level, is the one feature of Buddhism that I most emphasised in my work, in contrast to the aforementioned distorted, passive and humanitarian interpretations of the doctrine.

A further feature of Buddhism (in its authentic and essential formulation) that I emphasised is the fact that Buddhism cannot be termed a religion in the common, theistic sense of the word. And this is not because Buddhism is a mere moral system inferior to religion; but, on the contrary, because Buddhist doctrine transcends religion. Buddhism cannot be termed a religion insofar as every initiatory and esoteric doctrine cannot be termed a religion. An aspiration towards the unconditioned leads the Buddhist ascetic beyond Being and beyond the god of Being; beyond the very bliss of celestial heavens, which the ascetic views as a binding force – for the hierarchies of the traditional, popular deities are seen as part of the finite, contingent world to be transcended. In Buddhist texts it is frequently written that: 'He (i.e., the ascetic) has transcended this world and the world beyond, the human bond and the divine bond: for both bonds he has broken.' The ultimate goal of Buddhism, therefore, the Great Liberation, perfectly coincides with that of the purest metaphysical tradition, and coincides with the supersubstantial apex, both anterior and superior to being and non-being, and to any personal or 'creator' god.

While my book made other, similar clarifications, adequately outlining the doctrinal framework of Buddhism (for instance, by explaining the theory of the 'chain of causes' that leads to the finite existence of the non-I, and by clarifying the obscure idea of reincarnation), the focus of my study was the practical side of Buddhism: its asceticism, which I explored on the basis of the evidence from primary texts. By referring here to other esoteric traditions, I sought to define Buddhist practice in a more adequate way than either Orientalists or contemporary representatives of Buddhism had done.

In my introduction to *The Doctrine of Awakening*, I pointed out that my choice to focus on Buddhism was due to the fact that this discipline, more than any other, embodies 'a complete and objective method of ascesis, expressed in lucid and conscious terms which are both unmitigated, tested and well-articulated; a method that suits the spirit of the Aryan man, but also takes account of the conditions which have become prevalent in recent

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on the Lion's Roar.

times.' The techniques of Buddhism are conscious techniques, free of any religious or moral mythology – morality being merely regarded as the means to an end in Buddhism, which ignores the fetishism of moral values (i.e., the intrinsic imperativeness of given norms). Buddhist techniques might be described as scientific, for they take account of each step in the path to self-realisation, and of the organic links existing between each phase of the ascetic process. The ultimate aim of Buddhist asceticism is the quenching of thirst: deconditioning, awakening, the Great Liberation. In my book, I emphasised how at least part of these disciplines for self-realisation can be pursued while leading an ordinary life, as a way of strengthening one's inner character, of achieving detachment, and of establishing something invulnerable and indestructible within oneself. The 'aristocratic' ascesis of Buddhism, therefore, can also be of an immanent kind: in the closing pages of my work, I focused on the contemporary value of Buddhist practice for alienated individuals as an antidote to the psychic milieu of a world marked by senseless activity, and by the identification with 'vital', irrational and chaotic forces. As the reader might recall, I had emphasised this very point at the end of the second edition of *The Yoga of Power*, where I described the essential prerequisites to tread the Tantric path. After all, the '*Shiva*' principle, which according to the Tantras must come to rule the '*Shakti*', in the ultimate merging of the two, coincides with the 'extra-samsaric' principle that Buddhist ascesis seeks to incorporate and reinforce.

My reference in the book to an ascesis 'that takes account of the conditions which have come to prevail in recent times' alluded to the general theory regarding the degeneration which has come to mark world history even from an existential perspective. For man, today, is far from finding himself in a condition where he might rely, for the purposes of spiritual self-realisation, on the presence of genuine and effective contacts with the transcendent, or on external forms of traditional support. The Buddha himself is the image of an individual who has paved his own way: a 'warrior ascetic' destined to establish a chain of spiritual masters and of corresponding spiritual influences. The most important feature of original Buddhism, therefore, was its practical streak: an affirmation of the primacy of action that shuns all idle speculation, all wandering of the mind through problems, hypotheses, fantasies and myths; in other words: the primacy of personal, self-realising experience. It is for this reason that the Buddha doctrinally favoured 'negative theology', refusing to theorise or talk about the supreme goal to be achieved. The Buddha merely described such a goal in negative terms, as that which it is *not* and that which must be overcome.

Following an exposition of those methods found in the Pāli canon,[25] my book briefly focused on later forms of Buddhism, the essential features of which I emphasised, along with their continuity with the original doctrine of the Buddha. In the case of Mahāyanā, one of the two great Buddhist schools which later developed – a school which has recently received much attention in the West – I distinguished two sets of features: on the one hand, those features deriving from either the re-emergence of the demon of dialectic, and abstract or mythologizing speculation, or the reaffirmation of religious tendencies (an inevitable occurrence in those cases where a superior teaching is not confined to and guarded by esotericism – the historical Buddha himself having originally opposed the idea of divulging the truth and the path he had discovered); on the other, those features which reflect an audacious shift in perspective: an attempt to illustrate the point of view of those who are no longer striving for enlightenment, but who have fully attained it. In this respect, Mahāyanā espouses both the doctrine of 'emptiness' and the complementary and apparently contradictory doctrine of the identity between *nirvāna* and *samsāra:* between the unconditioned and conditioned, transcendence and immanence, the world and what transcends the world, the absolute and the relative. Such truth can only be grasped at the very end of the spiritual path.

Finally, my book briefly explored that branch of esoteric Buddhism known as Ch'an in China and as Zen in Japan. Such esoteric currents resumed the very tendencies which lay at the basis of Buddha's reaction against degenerate Brahmanism: for, in the course of the centuries, the doctrine of awakening had itself been contaminated by speculation and exterior, ritualistic, religious and moralising formalities. Zen brought an end to all this by emphasising the central goal of Buddhism – that of achieving a radical break with ordinary consciousness (the attainment of *satori*[26]) – often in genuinely iconoclastic terms, and by the use of techniques of a violent or paradoxical sort. What I also found interesting was the fact that Zen turned Buddhism into the 'Samurai doctrine' of the Japanese warrior caste – something which confirmed my own conclusions as to a free use of Buddhist asceticism. For Zen disciplines came to be employed as a way to gain an inner strength and detachment which found an applicability not only in the field of transcendent contemplation, but also in that of absolute action. More generally, Zen played a central role in shaping the inner approach adopted in many aspects of Japanese life – a further disproval of the deformed and one-sided portrayal of Buddhism prevalent today.

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[25] The Pāli Canon, so called because it was written in the Pāli language, is the only early Buddhist canon to survive in its entirety, and it is the standard collection of scriptures in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Several versions of it are available in English.

I was one of the first writers in Italy to briefly, but adequately, discuss Zen. In the aftermath of the Second World War, this doctrine became almost fashionable for a time, but in a way that reflects the provincialism of the Italian press. For Zen, in Italy, only became an interesting subject (featuring even in newsreels) because it happened to have been 'discovered' by one of the 'burnt out' generations of America: that of the hippies and beatniks, who regarded the irrational and iconoclastic doctrines of Zen, aimed as they are at bringing about sudden and gratuitous enlightenment, as something which might meet their needs and save them from inner collapse.

An English translation of *The Doctrine of Awakening* was published in 1951 by Luzac & Co.[27] (the book inspired its translator, a man named Mutton,[28] to leave Europe for the East, where he hoped to find a place still cultivating those disciplines I had praised; unfortunately, I have received no news of the man since). A French translation was also published in 1956 by Éditions Adyar. The English edition of the book was approved by the Pāli Society, a renowned academic institute for the study of early Buddhism, which acknowledged the validity of my work. My publication of *The Doctrine of Awakening* has led some to believe that I am either a Buddhist or a specialist in Buddhism. This, of course, is not quite true. Having reached my goal by publishing the book, I no longer focused on the subject. The goal I had set myself with the book was that of presenting Buddhism as an example of the 'dry', or intellectual spiritual path, based on pure detachment; a path opposite to that which I had outlined in my study of Tantrism, a discipline based on the affirmation, assimilation, use and transformation of immanent forces to be freed by the awakening of *Shakti* – the root-power behind all vital energy, and (in the form of *kundalini*) all sexual energy. With regard to their ultimate aim, the two spiritual paths are equivalent, if followed to the very end. One path can be preferred to the other according to different circumstances, individual character and personal existential disposition.

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[26] *Satori* is the Japanese Buddhist term for enlightenment.

[27] The 1951 edition of *The Doctrine of Awakening* was the only English-language translation of a complete book by Evola to appear during his lifetime.

[28] Evola was mistaken – the translator was actually Harold Edward Musson (1920-1965), who, after becoming a Theravāda Buddhist, went by the name Ñánavíra Thera. Musson served in the British Army in Italy during the Second World War, and it was during this time that he discovered Evola's book. In 1948, in part because of Evola's work, he moved to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where he remained in solitude for the rest of his life, and practiced Buddhism. He committed suicide after a prolonged illness. Despite his initial enthusiasm for Evola, however, he wrote a letter to a friend in 1964 in which he advised that he 'cannot now recommend (*The Doctrine of Awakening*) to you without considerable reserves.' This letter, along with many of Musson's other writings, can be found at the *Ñánavíra Thera Dhamma Page* (www.nanavira.org).

Besides, my book on Hermeticism had already illustrated a different, Western tradition based on methods of spiritual self-realisation, while my study of the Grail had emphasised the initiatory nature of the symbolism employed in the epic and chivalrous literature of Medieval Europe; my introduction to Taoism, and the commentary to my second edition of Lao Tzu's *Tao-té-ching* had defined the essential features of this esoteric tradition of the East. Considering the further contributions I offered in *Introduction to Magic* and, with regard to the 'path of sex', in one of my latest books (*The Metaphysics of Sex*, which I will come to discuss), it is clear that, with my work, I provided those interested in certain matters with a substantial repertoire of rare material, which I gathered, organised and interpreted from the only adequate perspective: that of Tradition.

THE ISSUE OF RACE

Beside the original results attained in my studies in the field of spirituality, I ought to here discuss my engagement with the issue of 'racism'. Racist ideology, as is known, had always played a prominent role within National Socialism: generally promoted in an extremist and primitive fashion, racism represented one of the most problematic features of the Third Reich, and one in need of rectification. On the one hand, racism was associated with anti-Semitism; on the other, racism had given rise to 'pagan' tendencies, the chief exponent of which was Alfred Rosenberg.[1] As I already mentioned when talking of *Pagan Imperialism*, Rosenberg – whom I had personally met – regarded me as the spokesman of an Italian current similar to his own. In fact, the differences between my own thought and that of Rosenberg were very conspicuous. In his well-known book entitled *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*,[2] Rosenberg, not unlike myself, had quoted authors such as Wirth and Bachofen in order to discuss the idea of Nordic origins, and to provide a dynamic historical analysis of various civilisations from a racist perspective. Rosenberg's study, however, was superficial and imprecise; politically, it was aimed at serving, almost exclusively, German interests. Rosenberg also lacked any understanding of holiness and transcendence – hence his most primitive critique of Catholicism, a religion which he even attacked, in a kind of renewed *Kulturkampf*,[3] by borrowing the most obsolete arguments from Enlightenment and secularist polemics. The 'myth of the twentieth century', according to Rosenberg, was to be the myth of blood and race: 'A new myth of life that is called forth to create, along with a new kind of life, a new kind of state and of civilisation.'

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[1] Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) was a Baltic German who became the foremost intellectual in National Socialism. He was a member of the Thule Society, and joined the German Workers' Party (later to become the Nazi Party) in January 1919, before Hitler himself joined. Heavily influenced by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Rosenberg wrote several books explicating National Socialist racial policy, couching his ideas in anti-Christian terms (since Christianity is of Semitic origin). Despite his prominence, however, the practical impact of his ideas on the Third Reich was minimal. During the Second World War, he was appointed Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, and it was for this role that he was executed at the Nuremberg Trials. Some of his writings have been translated.

[2] *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Torrance: Noontide Press, 1982).

As for the racism of the German state, it merged a sort of pan-Germanic nationalism with the ideas of biological science. With respect to the latter, I believe that Trotsky[4] was not far off the mark when he described racism as a kind of zoological materialism.[5] The German state embraced biology, eugenics, and the theory of heredity, accepting all the materialist assumptions behind such doctrines. This led National Socialism to posit the unilateral dependence of the superior to the inferior: of the psychic and super-biological part of man to the biological. This materialist view was little affected by the superimposition of a vague mystique of blood. A materialist perspective was also responsible for the National Socialist illusion that mere prophylactic intervention on the biological level – an intervention, that is, upon the physical race – might automatically better all aspects of the life of peoples and nations. Where a similar analysis might have proven valid was in the idea that it is not the state, society or civilisation which are of central importance, but rather race – had 'race' here been understood in its higher sense, as describing the deepest and most fundamental components of man.

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[3] German: 'culture war'. More specifically, in the German context, the term refers to a number of policies enacted by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in the 1870s intended to reduce the power of the Catholic Church in favour of a more secular conception of the state.

[4] Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) was a Russian Jew and Communist intellectual who was second only to Lenin in the early days of the Soviet Union. He is credited with creating the Red Army. After Lenin's death, he came to disagree increasingly with the policies of Stalin, which led to his exile from the Soviet Union in 1929. For the remainder of his life, he wrote many books on Communism and the contemporary political situation until he was assassinated by a Stalinist agent in Mexico in 1940.

[5] Trotsky defined it thus in his essay 'What is National Socialism?', included in *The Struggle Against Fascism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), pp. 410-411.

Also potentially valid was the National Socialist acknowledgement of the need and opportunity to 'fight for a worldview' appropriate for the Aryan man – this representing a means of promoting a broad reassessment of the values which have come to inform the Western world. A negative element, instead, was the fanatical anti-Semitism of National Socialism, something which many people have regrettably come to identify with racism *tout court*.[6]

On more than one occasion in the past, I had already had my say on the issue of materialist racism. As for Nazi neo-paganism, at a press conference held in 1936 at the *Kulturbund*[7] of Vienna, I argued that its theories were enough 'to turn into Catholics even those best disposed towards paganism'. I should also mention the fact that Mussolini expressed his approval of one article of mine entitled 'Race and Culture' ('Razza e cultura'), which I had published in 1935 in the magazine *Italian Review (Rassegna Italiana)*. In this article, I affirmed the pre-eminence of formative ideas over merely biological and ethnic traits (the same argument I also made in the pages of my own section in *Regime Fascista*). An editorial of mine in Balbo's[8] newspaper, *Corriere Padano*, was also well-received by the upper echelons of the Fascist regime. The editorial was entitled 'The Duty of Being Aryan' ('Responsabilità di dirsi ariani'), and was aimed at criticising the fetish of physical race. I here denounced the irrelevance of 'Aryanness' as an expression used merely to denote individuals who are neither Jewish nor coloured, rather than as a term employed in the spiritual and ethical sense to imply a certain duty towards oneself. Racism, I suggested, certainly expressed legitimate needs, but needed to be redefined on a different basis.

By exploiting my aforementioned influence in certain German circles, I sought to promote a rectification of racist ideology. The opportunity for me to take a more decisive stand on the matter, however, only presented itself in 1938, when Fascism suddenly turned 'racist' and issued its 'Race Manifesto'.[9]

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[6] French: 'in short.'

[7] Deutsche Kulturbund, or 'German Cultural Union.' The Deutsche Kulturbund was created by Prince K.A. Rohan in 1922, and, like the Herrenklub, was an aristocratic organisation. Unlike the Herrenklub, however, the Kulturbund was strongly Catholic, and also favoured a pan-European outlook as opposed to a doctrine of Germanic supremacy.

[8] Italo Balbo (1896-1940) was a First World War veteran who joined the Fascists in 1921. He was later appointed to head the Italian Air Force, and he became an internationally famous pilot in his own right. He was appointed Governor of Ethiopia in 1933. He was accidentally shot down by Italian anti-aircraft fire as he was attempting to land at Tobruk, Libya, shortly after a British air attack. Some believe he was assassinated by Mussolini for publicly disagreeing with the latter's alliance with Germany, which Balbo considered to be a mistake.

As in the case of many other policies adopted by the Fascist regime, most people today have misunderstood the Fascist embrace of racism. It is generally believed that Fascism passively followed Hitler in this regard, and that racism, in Italy, was merely something imported. It is certainly true that racist ideology had no precedents in Italy – not least because of the historical precedents of the country – and that it only took hold with difficulty. Yet, intrinsic and legitimate reasons existed for the Fascist promotion of racism. Firstly, the establishment of an empire in Africa, and the new contact with coloured peoples such an empire entailed, required a sense of remoteness, and for the racial consciousness of the Italian people to be strengthened, as to avoid forms of dangerous promiscuity and to safeguard a necessary colonial prestige. Besides, the same approach was favoured by Britain until very recently – had it been maintained by Whites, it would have forestalled the kind of 'anti-colonial' uprisings which struck at the heart of a weakened Europe like a righteous Nemesis[10] in the aftermath of the Second World War.

A second justification for the Fascist embrace of racism was the well-documented anti-Fascist sentiment of international Jewry, which intensified following Italy's alliance with Germany. It was only natural, therefore, for Mussolini to react. The suffering of Jews in Fascist Italy – a small thing in comparison to that of Jews in Germany – was due to the attitude of Jews on the other side of the Alps. The third and most important reason for the Fascist adoption of racism, however, was Mussolini's ambition to invest his 'revolution' with more than a merely political significance by shaping a new kind of Italian. Mussolini correctly believed that political movements and states require adequate and well-defined human resources in order to survive and assert themselves. It is as a means to secure such resources that Mussolini first approached the myth of race and blood.

The Italian 'Race Manifesto', however, which had been hurriedly assembled on Mussolini's orders, proved a slipshod piece of work. No doubt, Italy lacked individuals capable of discussing similar issues. The same carelessness that marked the Manifesto also surfaced in the course of the Fascist racial campaign, which was partly articulated by means of cheap and virulent polemics. All of a sudden, a whole bunch of Fascist men of letters and journalists realised they were 'racists', and started using the word 'race' at every turn, to describe the most varied and less pertinent things. People also started talking of the 'Italian race', an utterly meaningless idea, given that no modern nation corresponds to one race – Italy least of all. The various European races described in racial studies rather feature as the single components of a whole in almost all Western nations.

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[9] The text of the 1938 Race Manifesto is available in *A Primer of Italian Fascism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[10] Nemesis was the Classical Greek god of retribution.

In 1937, the publisher from Hoepli entrusted me with the writing of a history of racism. The book was entitled *The Myth of Blood* (*Il mito del sangue*), and a second edition of the work was published during the war. In this volume, I discussed the antecedents of racism in the ancient world (where 'race' was seen not as a myth, but as a living reality), and in the centuries leading up to the present day. I then outlined the modern variants of racial ideology by describing the basic ideas of de Gobineau,[11] Woltmann,[12] de Lapouge,[13] Chamberlain[14] and various other authors. I also examined racist views of anthropology, genetics, heredity and typology, and discussed the racist view of history and the foundations of anti-Semitism. Finally, I provided an outline of the various forms of political racism in Hitler's day. The book, with its descriptive character, allowed me to clarify a number of points.

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[11] Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) was a French novelist who is also credited with writing the first theory of modern racialism: *The Inequality of Human Races* (New York: H. Fertig, 1967). In it, de Gobineau first asserted the idea of Aryan supremacy, although his ideas were greatly at odds with the later views of the National Socialists.

[12] Ludwig Woltmann (1871-1907) was a German Marxist who later became convinced that socialism needed to be merged with eugenics and Social Darwinism in order to protect the Teutonic race, believing that race was the genuine agent of social change. None of his works have been translated.

[13] Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936) was a French anthropologist, socialist, and racial theorist. He was the author of *L'Aryen: son rôle social* (*The Aryan and His Social Role*), published in Paris in 1899 and never translated into English. In this work he classified the various races, and proposed that the European Aryans are in opposition to the Jews as racial archetypes. His ideas were highly influential upon the racialist and eugenics movements.

[14] Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927) was an English philosopher whose ideas about the supremacy of the Germanic peoples, as outlined in his most fundamental book, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, became highly influential upon the German racialist movement. Chamberlain was also an anti-Semite, and he was a devout Wagnerian, marrying Wagner's daughter, Eva, and becoming an integral part of the Bayreuth Circle of Wagnerian German nationalists. Even the Kaiser praised him for his efforts. In his last years, Hitler visited him several times at Bayreuth, and Chamberlain, discouraged by Germany's defeat in the First World War, was so enthusiastic that he lent his support to the fledgling National Socialists shortly before his death, convinced that it was Hitler's destiny to lead the German people to greatness.

The research I had conducted in order to write *The Myth of Blood* led me to develop a racial doctrine of my own. I outlined such a doctrine in a book entitled *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* (*Sintesi di dottrina della razza*), which was published by Hoepli in 1941 (a slightly revised edition was published in German by Runge Verlag of Berlin). The appendix of the volume included 52 photos.

One's idea of race depends on one's idea of man: the nature of each racial doctrine is determined by its conceptualisation of the human being. All distortions in the field of racism derive from a materialist view of man, a view informed by science and naturalism. By contrast, at the very basis of my racial doctrine I placed the traditional idea of man as a being comprised of three elements: body, character and spirit. I argued that an exhaustive racial theory has to take all three elements into account by examining race in its threefold manifestation: as race of the body, race of the character, and race of the spirit. Racial 'purity' is found when these three races stand in harmonious balance with one another, each race shining through the other two. This, however, has long been only a rare occurrence. The most unwelcome consequence of the various cases of miscegenation which have occurred during the historical development of human society is not the alteration of the physical race and psychosomatic type – what ordinary racism is chiefly concerned with – but, rather, the divide and contrast between the three kinds of races within the same individual. As a consequence of such miscegenation, one finds men whose body no longer reflects their character, and whose emotional, moral and volitional dispositions no longer agree with their spiritual inclinations. 'Spirit' should here be distinguished from 'character' as that component of man in touch with higher values that transcend life. In this sense, the 'race of the spirit' manifests itself in the different approaches to the sacred, to destiny and to the question of life and death, as well as in worldviews, religions, etc. I here argued, therefore, that three levels of racism ought to be distinguished in order to reflect the three kinds of races: the first level of racism pertaining to the race of the body, the second to the race of the character, and the third to the race of the spirit.

In my study of race, I argued that in accordance with the legitimate inner hierarchy of man, the inner race ought to be regarded as superior to the external and merely biological form. A similar approach called for a radical reassessment of the views of materialist racism, not least with respect to genetics and heredity. I rejected the fetish of merely physical racial purity, on the grounds that the purity of the external race of an individual is often preserved even when his inner race has dimmed or deteriorated (a common example of this is that of the Dutch and Scandinavians). Such an approach also put the problem of miscegenation into perspective: miscegenation certainly has negative consequences in those cases where the inner race is weak; yet if the inner race is strong, the presence of an external element, introduced – albeit not in excess – by means of interbreeding, potentially provides a galvanising challenge (hence, the opposite problem of certain aristocratic stocks which degenerate on account of incestuous unions). These, and other, similar considerations I made in my book.

From a political and social perspective, I acknowledged the use of racism as the expression of an anti-egalitarian and anti-rationalistic approach. Racism clearly emphasises the idea of differentiation, with regard to both the peoples and the members of a given people. Racism opposes the democratic ideology born of the Enlightenment which proclaims the identity and equal dignity of all human beings; on the contrary, racism asserts that humanity as such is either an abstract and fictitious concept, or the final stage in a process of degeneration, dissolution and collapse – a stage only to be posited as an outmost limit never actually to be reached. Human nature, instead, is ordinarily differentiated, and this differentiation is expressed in the form of different bloodlines and races. This differentiation constitutes the primary feature of humanity: not only is it a natural condition among all beings, but also a positive element, something which ought to exist, and ought to be defended and safeguarded. The acknowledgement of diversity never led me – unlike certain other racists – to conceive humanity as a series of isolated, self-contained units; nor did it lead me to reject all higher principles. A kind of unity is certainly conceivable for humanity, but only at a higher level; and such unity accepts and preserves differentiation at a lower level. Unity 'from below', on the other hand, is a regressive phenomenon: such is the levelling unity sought by democracy, 'integrationism', humanitarianism, pseudo-universalism and collectivism. De Gobineau had already criticised similar ideas, essentially by promoting racism in aristocratic terms.

The other, generally positive aspect of racism is its anti-rationalism, which accompanies the racist embrace of differentiation as an attempt to valorise the kind of qualities, dispositions and dignities which cannot be bought, gained or replaced, which do not derive from an external influence or from the environment, which are related to the living whole of an individual person, and which have their roots in a deep, organic terrain. Such is the foundation of the individual person, as opposed to the merely abstract or amorphous individual. My aforementioned racial theory provided a safe key to approach these issues by emphasising the fact that human races cannot be discussed in the same terms as horse or cat breeds: for human life, unlike the life of animals, is not confined to instincts and *bios*.[15]

The notion of an 'inner race', and of its pre-eminence over the external race, was particularly useful in two regards. On the one hand, from a moral point of view, this doctrine presented each race as an independent essence regarded as a universal in itself, almost as a Platonic 'idea' – although each race might empirically be understood in conjunction to a given physical race, among a given people. A similar analysis could practically be applied to the use of the terms 'Aryan' and 'Jewish', here understood as indicative of a series of attitudes that may or may not be found among all people of Aryan or Jewish blood. Such a use of the two terms would have provided a safeguard against conceit and one-sidedness: for what ultimately counted the most, in my view, was the inner form of each individual. As anticipated in my article in *Corriere Padano*, my doctrine of the inner race also implied a number of duties. It is for this reason, I may add, that after the war I was to emphasise the futility, from a superior perspective, of dwelling on the 'Jewish' or 'Aryan' question: for the negative behaviour which Jews are charged with is now common among most 'Aryans' (who, unlike Jews, lack the extenuating circumstance of any hereditary predisposition).

Moreover, the notion of inner race implied the idea of race as a moulding energy. Thus, the development of a definite human type free of ethnic miscegenation might be explained on the grounds of an inner moulding power, which finds its most direct manifestation in a given civilisation or tradition. A notable example of this phenomenon is provided by the Jewish people: originally lacking any ethnic unity (in a physical sense), the Jews came to possess recognisable hereditary traits thanks to their tradition, ultimately coming to embody one of the clearest historical examples of strenuous racial unity. A more recent example is that of North American society: for Americans have come to show rather constant racial traits (particularly in terms of inner race) thanks to the moulding power of their civilisation, which has shaped an extraordinarily mixed ethnic whole. My approach, therefore, ruled out the possibility that populations might be conditioned by biological factors alone.

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[15] Greek: 'life'.

The practical possibilities of applying my racial doctrine to the field of what Vacher de Lapouge termed 'political anthropology' were self-evident. In a country where the state embodies the role of a superior, active and moulding principle, an attempt to favour the differentiation of the ethnic make-up of the population is certainly a conceivable prospect. In this regard, National Socialism was not entirely mistaken. What ought to have been distinguished in Germany was negative racism – understood as a means to protect the nation from dangerous forms of miscegenation – from positive racism – which is aimed at fostering diversity within the national community in order to define and strengthen a superior human type. Modern racism goes beyond the broad racial distinctions found in school textbooks (those between the White race and the Black, Yellow, etc.): for even the White, 'Aryan' or Indo-European race ought to be divided into smaller groupings: the Mediterranean race, the Nordic, the Dinaric, the Slav, Ostid, etc. (such terms significantly varying among different authors). In his *Rassenseelekunde*,[16] L.F. Clauss[17] had also sought to provide a description of the soul and inner character of these different races, which are present in every European nation to various degrees. The aim of political racism ought to have been that of determining which race should be granted pre-eminence in the case of each country, and allowed to shape the nation. In the case of Germany, this race was the Nordic Aryan.

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[16] German: 'Racial soul studies'.

[17] Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss (1892-1974) was a German ethnologist who had been a student of Edmund Husserl. His idea that race was more a matter of the spirit than of biology, although still classifiable, was quite influential upon Evola. He travelled extensively in the Middle East, studying Arab culture, and he became a Muslim. Although initially hailed by the National Socialists for his advocacy of the superiority of the Nordic soul, he later fell out of favour with them since his racial theories were at odds with the Nazis' purely material definition of race, and his work was banned by them in 1942. Clauss further opposed them in more practical terms by hiding a Jewish colleague in a hidden room in his house, thus rescuing her from deportation, a deed for which he was posthumously lionised by the state of Israel. A small selection from his work was published in the anthology *Nazi Culture* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966).

I personally addressed the same question with regard to Italy, and reached the conclusion that the central, guiding race of the country was to be the Roman Aryan race, a race that in ancient times had broken away from the same branch which had later engendered the Nordic race. In my book, I provided a description of the Roman Aryan type primarily in terms of its inner race (I provided a rough outline of the typology of the various 'races of the spirit'). In a separate chapter, I also discussed the prospect of an ethnic rectification of Italy aimed at reducing the widespread 'Mediterranean' elements in favour of the Roman Aryan – this, it goes without saying, from the point of view of sensibility and customs. I here described the elite as a governing class which would not only possess authority, power and prestige thanks to its position, but also embody a superior human type, where external and inner race would ideally coincide. The book also contained an iconographic appendix with photos and images in order to provide initial guidance in the study of the various races of the body, of the character and of the spirit, and of the consequences of interfering with them.

My book, no doubt, provided an original approach to racism, which avoided the chief pitfalls that marked the German approach. In my study of the subject, I raised a number of points which, I believe, remain valid even outside the specific context in which they were first formulated.

From a historical perspective, it might be interesting to note that *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* was openly approved by Mussolini. After reading the book, Mussolini got in touch with me, praising the work beyond its real merit on the grounds that the doctrine it espoused was just what he needed. My racial doctrine, Mussolini believed, might allow him to engage with the same issues addressed in Germany, thus 'conforming' to Germany, while at the same time maintaining an independent approach based on a spiritual drive (the primacy of the spirit which German racism generally lacked). In particular, Mussolini believed that my theory regarding the Roman Aryan race, and the myth which accompanied it, might serve both to integrate the Roman ideal of Fascism and to provide a foundation for his attempt to rectify and elevate the Italian people – to create, as it were, a new kind of Italian – by means of the Fascist 'revolution' and state.

There is no need, for the purposes of the present enquiry, for me to dwell on my exchange with Mussolini in any detail. However, I should mention the fact that on this occasion I also informed the Duce of my work in Germany – work which I believed I might then conduct on a more impersonal level, given Mussolini's appreciation of my ideas. Hence, I informed Mussolini of my idea of publishing a new magazine entitled *Blood and Spirit* (*Sangue e Spirito*), a magazine which would be printed in both Italian and German, and would discuss those racial issues I had outlined in my book. Mussolini accepted my proposal and entrusted me with the planning of the magazine, which he agreed to publish, were the Germans also to prove interested. I thus started searching for qualified individuals with whom to discuss the contents of the future publication. After many a tiring meeting – all headed by a most worthy collaborator: Alberto Luchini,[18] who was the head of the Race Bureau of the Ministry for Popular Culture (as well as a man interested in traditional doctrines) – a plan for the magazine was produced. At a different session I showed the plan to Mussolini, who approved it in its entirety. I then travelled to Berlin, in order to get in touch with the Germans. I was cut short in the midst of my endeavour, however, when a sudden order came from the Italian embassy for me to stop what I was doing.

Only later was I informed of the reason behind this order: the alarm of certain people in Rome, who had gotten word of my exchanges with Mussolini. For while I was staying in Berlin, certain Catholics on the one hand, and certain members of the group behind the 'Race Manifesto' issued by the magazine *Defence of the Race (Difesa della Razza)*, on the other, had approached Mussolini. The latter people, in fear of losing their jobs, had pointed to the divergences between the previous manifesto which Mussolini had approved, and my own racial approach. Polemic attacks against me were made, despite my previous (if independent) collaboration with *Difesa della Razza*: given my interest in esoteric matters, my own brand of racism was sarcastically described as 'magical'. Yet such people generously provided me with many chances to strike back polemically – for instance, by making use of photomontages in the front pages of their magazine. For one such photomontage showed the beautiful, youthful head of a Classical statue being tarnished by a Jewish star: I here pointed out that the head was none other than that of Antinous,[19] the notorious homosexual of the Roman Empire – the statue charmingly illustrating what I had long been arguing: that the race of the body often preserves its purity despite the degeneration of the inner race.

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[18] In addition to his work on racial matters, it is worth mentioning that Alberto Luchini was a collaborator with the American poet Ezra Pound, who lived in exile in Fascist Italy. He worked with Pound on his translation of Confucius.

As for the Catholics, they were no doubt more alarmed by a racial doctrine such as mine – which emphasised the race of the spirit, thus affirming the inequality of human beings on the spiritual level – than by a kind of racism merely concerned with physical appearance. Besides, the idea of a race of the spirit implied a worldview by means of which such a race might be determined and expressed. In particular, this doctrine raised the question of what worldview, spirituality and values might be adequate for a superior racial type – in the case of Italy, the Roman Aryan type. This, of course, necessarily led to the reassessment of many of the values of the religion which had come to prevail among the races of the West, a religion the origins of which were far from being Roman and Aryan. The questions previously raised in *Pagan Imperialism* re-emerged here, although I addressed them in less extremist and heedless fashion. Catholics were aware of the potential threat posed by Mussolini's interest in my ideas, a threat that could only be rendered more serious by the prospect of a Fascist collaboration with Germany. With Jesuitical shrewdness, these Catholics avoided any direct confrontation: while making no mention of what they were truly after, these people presented Mussolini with a written complaint in which they emphasised all the features of my doctrine that clashed with some of the central ideas of Fascism. For instance, these Catholics suggested that racial discrimination was detrimental to the idea of national unity as it belittled the notion of homeland, and that the ideal of a Roman Aryan character clashed with the Fascist ideal of 'Latinity'. The Catholic letter of complaint to Mussolini continued along similar lines, and included prudishly outraged comments regarding what I had written in my work against bourgeois morals, and in favour of the rectification of the 'Mediterranean' component of the Italian people in the field of sexuality and the relation between the sexes.

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[19] Antinous (110?-130) was a Greek who became the lover of the Roman Emperor, Hadrian. Hadrian was so grief-stricken by Antinous' death that he proclaimed him to be a god, and he was often depicted as Osiris or Bacchus.

Mussolini, therefore, who – despite his appearance – was a man easily influenced, began to waver in his opinion. Hence the order from the Italian embassy in Berlin. After returning to Rome, I discovered that orders had been given to interrupt the *Sangue e Spirito* project for some time. Following the outbreak of the war, however, the project was never resumed.

War also prevented the completion of a different project which Mussolini had approved: for I had planned to carry out an investigation on the racial components of the Italian people. While, as I previously mentioned, the idea of an 'Italian race' is absurd, an examination of the chief racial components of Italy was a conceivable project. The three aspects of race here ought to have been taken into account, and the investigation ought to have centred on the assessment of the presence – or survival – of the Roman Aryan type among the Italian. For such a purpose, a commission was nominated, comprised of an anthropologist, to study the race of the body, and a psychologist (a professor from the Institute of Psychology of the University of Florence), to study the race of the character (psychic behaviour, reactions, etc.) – L.F. Clauss, who had accepted our invitation, had been entrusted specifically with assessing the latter race in its psychologically disturbed manifestations. I myself would have carried out an investigation of the race of the spirit, which I planned to accomplish by means of specific tests on basic spiritual matters. Our commission ought to have examined the members of ancient families across the various regions and cities of Italy. The initial results of our enquiry would then have been published in one volume, along with various photos. The turn of events, however, prevented the accomplishment of this interesting and unprecedented project (which, in part, had already been organised).

When Mussolini first got in touch with me to give me his opinion on *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race*, he asked me how the book had been received by Italian culture. Pavolini,[20] the Minister for Popular Culture, had sent a 'handout' to the press to draw attention to my work. However, similar handouts were sent out all the time, usually by the authors themselves, and the press hardly took notice of my work. When Mussolini was informed of this fact, he angrily gave orders to categorically repeat the announcement. A torrent of reviews naturally followed, first in the pompous *Evening Courier (Corriere della Sera)*, and then in other important newspapers which had hardly bothered to mention my books in the past. In such a way, many people in Italy came to know me only as the author of a book on race, and I was soon labelled a 'racist' – this proving a rather sticky label – as if I had dealt with no other subject in the course of my career. As should be evident from what I have written so far, mine had been an attempt to engage with the issue of race from a superior, spiritual perspective. Racism I actually regarded as a secondary matter: my purpose was rather that of contrasting the errors of the materialist and primitive brand of racism which had surfaced in Germany, and which some people amateurishly sought to emulate in Italy. This field, too, I explored in accordance with my own inclinations, and nothing I then wrote I now truly disown – although I acknowledge the meaninglessness of any attempt to resume similar discussions today.

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[20] Alessandro Pavolini (1903-1945) was an early member of the Fascist Party who served in various government positions for the remainder of his life. His father was a scholar of Sanskrit. He was particularly interested in culture, and he wrote frequently, calling for an aristocratic conception of Fascism. Some of his Italian cultural initiatives survived his death. Pavolini joined the Italian Social Republic in 1943, and was appointed by Mussolini to lead the new Fascist Party there. On 28 April 1945, he was discovered by anti-Fascist partisans while attempting to escape. After he exhausted his ammunition, he was captured and executed.

The same holds true for the Jewish question, which I discussed in terms other than those of vulgar anti-Semitism.[21] The influence of Judaism on modern culture and society, by means of both international capitalism and by revolutionary, corrosive political agitation, can hardly be denied. In my work, I sought to prove that this influence has chiefly come from the secular side of Judaism, which abandoned the ancient Jewish tradition. Certain aspects of this ancient tradition were distorted and materialised by secular Judaism, allowing for the kind of instinctual outbreaks of a given human type that had previously been held in check. In fact, I held little against the Jewish tradition as such: in my studies of esotericism, I had frequently quoted the Kabbalah, ancient Hebrew texts and Jewish authors (not to mention my praise of Michelstaedter, himself a Jew, and my interest in the work of another Jew, Weininger, whose most important book I endeavoured to publish in a new Italian edition). I discussed the development of Judaism as a corrosive force in one chapter of *The Myth of Blood* and in an article I published in the fifth volume of *Research on the Jewish Question* (*Forschungen zur Judenfrage*).[22] Here, too, my chief emphasis lay on the inner race and on actual behaviour. Finally, from a historical perspective, I denounced both the one-sidedness and the dangers of fanatical, visionary anti-Semitism – something I also stressed in my introduction to Preziosi's edition of the well-known and much debated *Protocols of the Elders of Zion.*[23] What I denounced, in other words, was the danger of believing that Judaism alone is the enemy: such a belief I was even inclined to see as one of the tactics employed in what I described as the 'occult war', a tactic which makes the enemy focus on a limited area in order to divert his attention from other areas, where the attack continues unnoticed. What was necessary, I argued, was rather to be aware of the occult front of global subversion and of the forces of anti-Tradition in their entirety – something I had adequately described in *Revolt Against the Modern World.* The ultimate framework of the Jewish question might be described as a metaphysical struggle protracted throughout the ages. Within such a framework, certain organisations – most recently, political Freemasonry, as well as secular Judaism – have merely played the role of tools subordinate to vaster influences. A similar perspective is not so different from that of a certain kind of historical theology. Finally, it goes without saying that neither I nor any of my friends in Germany knew about the Nazi outrages against the Jews; had we known about such outrages, in no way would we have approved of them.

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[21] In particular, see Evola's *Three Aspects of the Jewish Problem.*

[22] *Forschungen zur Judenfrage 5* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1941).

In the same period, I also translated a book written by French Viscount Léon de Poncins[24] and by the Polish Count E. Malinsky,[25] and entitled *The Occult*

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[23] *L'internazionale ebraica: I 'Protocolli' dei 'savi anziani' di Sion* (Rome: La Vita Italiana, 1937). *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a document which first surfaced in Russia in 1903, and which subsequently spread throughout the world. It purports to be a record of a conversation between Jewish leaders who are discussing the means by which they will subvert, and eventually dominate, the entire world. Although substantial evidence has long been available which shows the *Protocols* to be a forgery, it has always been a cornerstone of anti-Semitic thought. Evola argued that the matter of its authenticity was irrelevant, since, regardless, the document was descriptive of processes which were clearly at work in the world. Therefore, it was true, even if it was inauthentic. Several editions of the *Protocols* have been published in English. Evola's own introduction to it is available at *Evola As He Is* (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id68.html).

[24] Léon de Poncins (1897-1976) was a Catholic author who wrote many attacks on those forces which he believed were subverting the Church, in particular the Jews, Communists and the Freemasons. Guénon also praised aspects of his work, although rejected its anti-Semitic content. Several of his books have been translated into English. Evola's own essay on the 'occult war', which was first printed in the second Italian edition of the book in 1961, is available in English at *Evola As He Is* (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id48.html).

[25] His full name was Emmanuel Malinsky. I can find no additional information about him.

War.[26] I believed it might be interesting to make this book available on account of its theses on Judaism and Freemasonry, which were not informed by a Nazi or Fascist perspective, but rather by the point of view of Catholic aristocrats. The work described the secret chain of events that, from the time of the Holy Alliance[27] and of Metternich[28] ('the last great European') down to the rise of Bolshevism, have led to the collapse of Europe. A new and slightly revised edition of my translation of the book was published in 1961.

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[26] *La guerra occulta: armi e fasi dell'attacco ebraico-massonico alla tradizione* (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1939). No English version exists.

[27] The Holy Alliance was a coalition of Austria, Prussia and Russia which was signed in Vienna in 1815. Originally it was intended to defend Christian values in Europe, but, as it was used by Austrian Prince Metternich, it became a force to counter the influence of the French Revolution, and opposed both democracy and secularism. Eventually, all the European states of the time signed onto it, except for Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and the Vatican. It is generally regarded to have ceased functioning after the death of Czar Alexander I in 1825.

[28] Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich (1773-1859) was a German Austrian who was one of the most important European diplomats of the Nineteenth century. He was involved in the negotiation of the Treaty of Paris in 1814, which marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, he was instrumental in establishing the new map of Europe, and the balance of power between the Great Powers which was to last, more or less intact, until the First World War. Although he was generally a reactionary, he did believe that the Austro-Hungarian Empire needed to protect equal rights for all its ethnic groups, and even proposed the creation of a parliament to this end, but he was unable to enact such reforms. He was forced to abdicate his power during the Revolution of 1848.

In Search of Men Among the Ruins

Aside from my work on the rectification of racism, in the period of time which roughly runs from the 25th of July 1943 (the day of the internal collapse of Fascism)[1] to the end of the Second World War, I produced nothing in terms of writing. An account of the events which marked my life in this period might prove of interest for some people; however, it would turn the present book into an autobiography – something altogether different from what it is meant to be. Hence, I shall only touch upon a few episodes.

Like many of my friends and many of the political figures with whom I was in contact in those days, I felt that the 25th of July had brought out all the inconsistencies and worst features of Fascism (and of its followers in particular). While the majority of the Italian people – that very people that had formed the delirious and 'oceanic' gatherings in front of Palazzo Venezia – was impudently preparing to change sides, its better members were seeking to ascertain whether certain valid ideals of the true Right might be safeguarded, and what forms such ideals might take in a future and different world (for what the outcome of the war would be was clear by then).

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[1] By July 1943, Fascist Italy was in a state of crisis. Italy's forces were being defeated on all fronts, and the Allies had succeeded in their invasion of Sicily, meaning that an Allied invasion of mainland Italy was imminent. On 24 July 1943, the Fascist Grand Council voted to restore King Victor Emmanuel III as Italian head of state. On July 25, Mussolini was arrested, and Fascist rule was ended in the south of Italy. Marshal Pietro Badoglio was appointed by the King to become head of state in Mussolini's place.

By way of unusual circumstances, on the 8th of September, the day Italian desertion was made public,[2] I found myself in Germany. I soon visited Rastenburg, Hitler's headquarters, to where some Italian Fascist leaders had already fled. Along with these people, I was one of the first to witness the arrival of Mussolini after he had been freed by Skorzeny.[3] The following morning, Mussolini proclaimed the Social Republic[4] (the establishment of which he had planned, on his own, the night before). To my eyes, the establishment of the Social Republic was a disagreeable turn for the worse. Once more, the unworthy behaviour of the representative of an institution (in this case, of the monarchy) had offered the pretext, not for the condemnation of the guilty individual, but for the condemnation of the institution which that individual represented. Such a process had already led to negative consequences in the past, allowing many subversive and revolutionary historical events to take place: it constituted, in fact, one of the strategies employed in what I termed the 'occult war'. Just as, in psychoanalytical terms, traumas can be the cause of regressive behaviour in human beings, the shock caused in Mussolini by the Sovereign's act of betrayal led to the re-emergence of those socialistic and republican tendencies which had marked Mussolini's early career. I felt no inclination, therefore, to embrace the 'Fascism of Salò' as an ideology. Nevertheless, I could not avoid acknowledging the warrior and legionary value of those hundreds of thousands of Italians who had chosen to remain loyal to their allies and to continue the war – as the King and Badoglio themselves had falsely promised to do after the 25th of July – conscious of waging a lost war, yet eager to safeguard the honour of their country. This remains an almost unique event in the history of Italy since the Roman Empire.

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[2] Initially, largely out of fear of the large numbers of German forces still present in northern Italy, Badoglio insisted that Italy would continue to fight on the side of the Axis. Secret negotiations with the Allies began, however, leading to an armistice on September 3. The armistice was made public on September 8.

[3] Otto Skorzeny (1908-1975) was a famed Obersturmbannführer in the Waffen SS during the Second World War. He is best known for his rescue of Mussolini on 12 September 1943. He remained active after 1945, helping fugitive Nazis through the ODESSA network, and also working with various neo-Fascist groups around the world, and especially in Argentina, in the hope of reviving Fascism. He also created the Paladin Group in 1970, which offered paramilitary training. He counted South Africa, Franco's Spain, the Greek military junta, Libyan Col. al-Qadhafi, and various Palestinian nationalist groups among Paladin's clients.

[4] The Repubblica Sociale Italiana, also sometimes known as the Salò Republic due to its being headquartered there, was the government of Fascist exiles which was set up in northern Italy. Once instated as its head of state, Mussolini returned to his socialist roots, and said that he had been prevented from realising the genuine Fascist revolution by political contingencies, and pledged to create a new Fascist state that was much more socialist in nature. He claimed to advocate workers' rights, and while the original Fascist regime had defended private property, he now nationalised all companies within his sphere of influence. Although ostensibly independent, with its own armed forces, the Republic was completely dependent on the Germans for its survival, and Mussolini was now little more than a German puppet. He declared the formation of the Republic, under pressure from Hitler, on 23 September 1943.

Personally, I believed that the most important step to be taken was that of ascertaining what might still be saved, and of checking the subversive tide which would doubtless have sought to gain the upper hand after the war. In Rome, therefore, at the time of the German occupation, I made a secret attempt to establish a 'Movement for the Rebirth of Italy'. Involved in this project, among others, were Senator Carlo Costamagna[5] - whom I had worked with in the past - and the Senator and former Minister, Balbino Giuliano.[6] The purpose of our Movement, which after the war would have become a political party, would have been analogous to that of the Movimento Sociale Italiano[7] – although our own Movement would have been conceived in more traditionalist terms as an expression of the Right devoid of one-sided references to Fascism (the negative as well as positive aspects of which we would have taken into account). Our political project came to an end at the time of the Allied occupation of Rome for a number of reasons (apparently, including an act of betrayal). I ought to have stayed in Rome, but the force of events led me away from the capital.[8] I then crossed the frontier and moved to Vienna, where I had been summoned, by way of northern Italy. In the Austrian city, a similar political project was underway as the one which had failed in Rome. However, not long before the Russian occupation of the city, a bombing raid caused an injury to my spinal cord. The injury, which appeared lethal at first, caused the partial paralysis of my lower limbs.

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[5] Carlo Costamagna (1881-1965) was a Fascist intellectual who published the political journal, *The State (Lo Stato)*, to which Evola contributed. He was also one of the signatories of the 1938 Race Manifesto. Costamagna argued that the state should not rely on force to obtain the loyalty of its subjects, but rather should become the moral example for the people to follow. This was a view with which Evola readily sympathised. His work is untranslated.

[6] Balbino Giuliano (1879-1958) was a professor who had also been Minister of National Education. He joined the Fascists in the 1920s and served in various capacities. An essay of his on Fascism is available in *What is Fascism and Why?* (London: E. Benn Ltd., 1931).

[7] The Italian Social Movement, or MSI, was a political party founded in 1946 by former members of the Italian Social Republic. It was often considered to be neo-Fascist, but this was not really the case since it repudiated many of the features of Fascism – by embracing a pan-European, as opposed to purely Italian, concept of nationalism; rejecting racism; and favouring a close Italian relationship with the United States and NATO. The MSI was dissolved in 1995 and replaced by the National Alliance, which was even more mainstream in character.

I thus found myself confined to hospital. Such an accident, no doubt, was not unrelated to a rule I had long chosen to follow: not to avoid, but, on the contrary, to seek dangers as a tacit way of putting fate to the test.[9] For this very reason, in the past, I had pursued mountain climbing at dangerous altitudes. I remained faithful to this very principle during the war, when a world was crumbling and the future was shrouded in uncertainty. The accident I fell victim to, however, lent itself to no obvious explanation. Not much changed in my life following the accident, as my handicap was merely physical: aside from the practical disadvantages, and the limitations it entailed from the point of view of my profane existence, the handicap hardly bothered me, for my spiritual and intellectual work remained unaffected by the accident. In my heart, I have always thoroughly subscribed to the traditional doctrine I often quoted in my writing, which teaches that we have wished all relevant events in our life before our birth.[10] I could not, therefore, avoid applying such a doctrine to the aforementioned event. To remember *why* I had wished such an accident upon myself, and to understand its most profound significance, is what truly mattered in my eyes – more than 'recovery' itself (something I cared little about). (Besides, as I saw it, had I been capable of grasping the 'memory' of such a wish by the light of knowledge, I would no doubt also have been capable of removing the physical handicap itself – if I had wished to do so.) To this day, however, the fog which clouds my memory has yet to lift. For the time being, I have come to adapt myself to the circumstances. Occasionally, I am humorously led to believe that it is gods who might be responsible for the situation, having used a little too much force when playing with me.[11]

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[8] According to Evola's diary, which is cited by H.T. Hansen in his introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, men from the 'secret service' came to his home shortly after the Allies occupied the city. Evola's mother delayed the men until he had escaped out the back door.

[9] According to numerous sources, Evola enjoyed taking solitary walks in the city during air raids, while everyone else was hiding underground in bomb shelters. It was during one of these walks that he was injured on 12 March 1945.

[10] The Greek Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus cites this doctrine in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1954).

Someone has spread the rumour that my accident was caused by pursuit of a 'Promethean' endeavour of some sort. This, of course, is sheer fantasy, not least because, at the time of the accident, I had long interrupted any work in the realm of the supernatural. Besides, I was living in Vienna incognito and under a false name. It is rather odd, however, that René Guénon himself favoured a similar interpretation at first. For when I got in touch with Guénon after the war, and informed him of my accident (in the secret hope that Guénon might help me to 'understand' the event), I was asked whether I suspected that someone might have acted against me by occult means. Guénon added that he himself had been confined to his bed for several months, apparently on account of arthritis, but actually as a consequence of an outside attack; and that he had recovered from his illness once the person responsible had been discovered and neutralised. I told Guénon that a similar attack would be an unlikely cause in my case, not least because an extraordinarily powerful spell would have been necessary to cause such damage: for the spell would have had to determine a whole series of objective events, including the occurrence of the bombing raid, and the time and place in which the bombs were dropped.[12]

It is interesting to note that when I questioned Guénon concerning *his* accident (his case of pseudo-arthritis), and asked him whether an individual who has attained a certain spiritual level might not be safe from all attacks of 'magic' and wizardry, Guénon replied by reminding me that, according to tradition, the Prophet Mohammed himself was not invulnerable in this regard. Apparently, the reason for this is that 'subtle', 'psychic' processes operate in a deterministic fashion, not unlike physical processes (a knife stab, for instance, causes damage regardless of the kind of person it hits). (Actually, I have some further reservations on the matter: for I believe that the process of materialisation of the individual – what contributes to distance him from the subtle forces of nature – can actually act as a protection against occult attacks of the kind I have just been discussing. Such attacks, therefore, would have little power over modern man, an intellectual type and city-dweller, whereas they would prove effective against more 'backward' and 'primitive' human groups.)

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[11] Evola's long-time friend, Mircea Eliade, remarked to one of his students regarding Evola's injury: 'Evola was wounded in the third *chakra*—and don't you find that significant?' The third *chakra* is associated with anger and pride. This is cited by Joscelyn Godwin in *Arktos* (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1993), p. 61.

[12] This correspondence is translated in the pamphlet by Evola, *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times.*

After about one and a half years spent in Austrian clinics, I returned to Italy in 1948. Here I was expecting to find a world in ruins – spiritual, as well as material. I was surprised, therefore, to discover the existence of groups of people – particularly of young people – which sought to avoid falling prey to the general collapse. Such groups knew and appreciated my books.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, I sought to revise the text of some of my works which had gone out of print, and which were about to be republished. Among these were the three monographic volumes of *Introduction to Magic*. A few years later, in 1951, I published a revised edition of *Revolt Against the Modern World*. At that time, I also felt the need to provide some ideological guidance for the groups I just mentioned. With such an aim in mind, I wrote a pamphlet entitled *Guidelines* (*Orientamenti*) in 1949, in which I outlined those ideas to be defended on a spiritual and political level. The pamphlet was published in conjunction with a magazine issued by one of these groups, and entitled *Imperium*.[13] Partly on account of this work, I soon found myself involved, against my will, in a rather farcical event.

The political police of Rome had planned to conjure up a kind of plot aimed at nothing less than the restoration of the Fascist regime. For the purpose of fabricating such a plot, the police assembled a mosaic out of a number of different elements which bore little relation with one another. On the one hand, the former tank drivers who, at Bologna, were planning to defend the city in case of a Communist threat (one of their leaders had just escaped murder); on the other, a group of young people which went under the name of 'Black Legion', and a few remnants of the FAR (Fasci d'Azione Rivoluzionaria[14] – the name adopted by the alliance which had formed the political party Movimento Sociale Italiano). To this list of alleged plotters, the police added the more qualified editors of *Imperium*, as well as the names of a few youngsters who had set off some harmless bombs pretty much in a tumultuously goliardic[15] spirit. The police made a hotchpotch of all these various elements, and portrayed it as a united secretive front aimed at restoring Fascism. About thirty people were arrested. But the figure of a leader, the mastermind of the 'plot', was still missing. As many of the young men treated me as their 'master', as I was the author of *Guidelines*, as I had handed a couple of articles of mine – and purely cultural articles at that – to the editors of *Imperium* by way of encouragement, I was soon accused by the police with such a fabricated role and arrested.

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[13] *Imperium* was the journal published by a youth group associated with the MSI.

[14] According to historian Stanley Payne, the FAR was the first neo-Fascist group to arise in Italy, having been organised in May 1945. After committing various acts, including terrorism, it was disbanded in May 1951.

Naturally, nothing came of the whole affair: the trial merely served to hold the zealots of the political police of the new Republic up to ridicule. Nearly all those charged were acquitted. Even the liberal press at the time raised its voice against the abuses of a dull executive power. In court, I was defended free of charge by an acclaimed lawyer, Francesco Carnelutti;[16] I also received the support of the former Minister of Justice, Piero Pisenti.[17] What contributed the most to my acquittal, however, was my own self-defence (which was later published in *Eloquence [Eloquenza]* magazine).[18] The political police were very disappointed at discovering that I had never joined any party – not even the Fascist – and that I was not even a member of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, with which they would happily have compromised. Naturally, I argued in court, I was completely unaware of the rash plans I had been charged with, and did not wish to encourage any trifling form of political activism. Once the main charge against me had been dropped, the police, in an attempt to save face, charged me with 'formal defence of Fascism' – without even bothering to find any piece of writing of mine that might substantiate such an accusation.

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[15] A goliard was a medieval European term for students who would wander about, known for their festive nature, and for their singing of humourous and ribald songs.

[16] Francesco Carnelutti (1879-1965) was indeed a prominent lawyer, who was also active as a monarchist after 1945. According to H.T. Hansen in his introduction to *Men Among the Ruins*, Carnelutti told Evola that he was not defending him because of his political beliefs, since he did not understand them, but because he wanted to prevent an injustice from occurring.

[17] Piero Pisenti (1887-1980) joined the Fascists in the 1920s and was a close collaborator with Mussolini. He remained loyal, and served as Minister of Justice in the Italian Social Republic, during which he oversaw the trial of those Fascists who had removed Mussolini from office in July 1943, after which they were condemned to death. Following a brief imprisonment after the war, he practiced as a lawyer. In 1977, he published an essay which defended the politics of the Republic.

[18] Evola's self-defence is available at *Evola As He Is* (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id58.html), as well as in an appendix to the Inner Traditions edition of *Men Among the Ruins*.

My defence in court, at least, allowed me to clarify one fundamental point. I here argued that it would be absurd to charge me with holding 'Fascist' views: for if I have ever defended a 'Fascist' view of the state, either in the present or in the past, I have done so not because such a view is 'Fascist', but because it embodies the ideals of the great political tradition of the European Right. My ideas could certainly be brought to trial, but in that case so could those of Plato (author of the *Republic*), Metternich, Bismarck,[19] Dante (author of the *De Monarchia*[20]) and countless others would have to be tried. Evidently, I argued, everything in our sad times is classed as either Fascist or anti-Fascist; and those who are neither democratic, nor socialist, or Communist are automatically branded 'Fascists'.

Several years later, in 1963, I published a book for Volpe Editions entitled *Fascism: A Critical Analysis from the Point of View of the Right* (*Il Fascismo – Saggio di una analisi critica dal punto di vista della Destra*). In the volume, I adopted the aforementioned approach with regard to Fascism, rejecting all 'mythologising', glorification and one-sided denigration of the phenomenon. Rather, I examined all the chief aspects of the Fascist system in order to define which of its features might be traced back to a higher and more ancient political ideal, and which, on the contrary, are more problematic, contingent, and of lesser value. A second edition of the book, published in 1970, also contains an appendix entitled 'Notes on the Third Reich', where the same methods of evaluation are applied to German National Socialism.

In the context of newly 'liberated' Italy, the farcical episode of my legal prosecution somewhat contributed to blacken my reputation. Those who bought current rumours, and had no intention of gaining firsthand knowledge of my work and ideas, continued to regard me as the 'Fascist' writer who had been in touch with terrorists. With equal ignorance and closed-mindedness, such people continued to label me a 'racist', a former friend of the Nazis, and an enemy of Catholicism. This proved more than enough for the Italian press to relegate my works to perpetual silence. Nevertheless, by this time I had acquired a more personal readership, small but diligent and loyal, which allowed my writings to be received by 'non-aligned' publishers. Given the nature of the Italian intelligentsia, I could well do without its attention and approval. In more recent years, Edizioni Mediterranee has almost entirely taken over the republication of my writings. Given the broad distribution network of such a publishing house, more copies of my books have been sold, independently of any promotional campaign based on 'reviews', thus reaching a broader public.

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[19] Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) was the Prussian leader who unified the German states into one nation during the 1860s, leading to his becoming the first Chancellor of the German Empire in 1871.

[20] Translated as *Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

The genesis of my next book, *Men Among the Ruins* – which was first published in 1953 by Edizioni dell'Ascia, and then twice by Volpe (a second revised edition of the book having being issued in 1972) – was due to a final attempt on my part to promote the development of a genuine front of the Right. The chance for an operation of this kind, in my eyes, had been offered by the rise of a particular tendency within the Movimento Sociale Italiano, as well as by the nature of those groups of young people I previously mentioned. I thus believed at the time that it might be useful to outline a series of general principles, pertaining to both the doctrine of the state and the view of life, which might serve as guidelines for the aforementioned front.

The first keyword, I argued, was to be *counter-revolution*. Leaving aside the broader horizons mentioned in *Revolt Against the Modern World*, in *Men Among the Ruins* I described the preliminary, practical duty of those men who remained standing (among the ruins, as it were) in terms of an integral and uncompromising rejection of all the ideologies born of the French Revolution. The liberal revolution, after all, represented the starting point of the latest phase in the crisis of Europe: having engendered the democratic revolution, it had paved the way for socialism and Communism. No compromise, in this respect, was to be made. In the face of the increasing insolence and arrogance of the forces of subversion, I invoked the intellectual and physical courage of labelling oneself a 'reactionary': a charge which all the petty politicians of Italy feared – including those belonging to so-called Right wing parties.

Naturally, the reaction I invoked had nothing to do with the kind of reaction which serves as a handy pretext for our enemies: for it had nothing to do with the interests of an economic class and with the capitalist Right. The reaction I had in mind was rather that of a political and aristocratic Right, which would regard any form of power derived from the mere possession of wealth as an act of usurpation and subversion. Counter-revolution I defined not on the basis of material interests but of ideals. With the rejection of progressive social myths, I argued, fundamental ideals would emerge which possessed an immutable normative value for all social and political organisations of a superior kind. In a similar way, I suggested, Vico[21] had spoken of 'the natural laws of an eternal republic which takes on various forms at different times and in different places'.[22]

On a more constructive level, the book identified the firm foundation of each true state in 'the transcendent nature of its principle, which is to say: in the transcendent origins of its sovereignty, authority and legitimacy.' The true state was here described as that permeated by the manifestation of a higher order, which is embodied in a given *power*. Consequently, I distinguished the sphere of politics from that of 'physical' phenomena. On account of its transcendent dimension, I argued, by virtue of embodying a higher *ideal* and *power*, 'the true state constitutes something altogether different from a mere union, from any kind of association artificially constructed or based on natural law, from any human aggregation founded on social, economic, biological, utilitarian or happiness-seeking principles.' *Authority*, thus conceived, also represents the necessary condition for the stability, firmness and unity of any socio-political organisation.

'The state is not an expression of society.' Society – in Aristotelian terms – is mere 'matter', whereas the state is 'form'. A similar relation exists – or ought to exist – between the state and nations or peoples (the *demos*): the former element embodies the masculine, spiritual principle; the latter the feminine, material principle. On these grounds, at the time of ancient Rome, 'the idea of the state and of *imperium* – of sacred authority – was related to the symbolic cult of male deities of the sky, of light and of the heavens – a cult contrary to that of the Mothers of the nether regions and of chthonic deities' (I had already emphasised such ideas in a paper I had delivered in various German cities, in an attempt to contrast the Nazi myth of the *Volk*[23] and the *Volksgemeinschaft*[24]).

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[21] Giambattista Vico (1668-1774) is an Italian philosopher who is best known for his book, *The New Science*, in which he outlined a cyclical theory of civilisations as progressing through three ages: the divine, the heroic, and the human age, which closely resembles traditional doctrines of history.

[22] I cannot locate the specific passage to which Evola is referring, but it is no doubt to be found in *The New Science*.

'Strictly speaking, the political sphere is defined by the use of hierarchical, heroic, ideal and anti-hedonistic warrior values . . . The use of such values removes the political sphere from a naturalistic and vegetative order of existence. Genuine political aims are mostly autonomous aims connected to needs and ideals of a different sort from those which characterise life in peace, pure economy and physical well-being: needs and ideals which are instead connected to a higher dimension of living, a separate level of dignity.' Hence, I argued, 'each political order, including the state itself, finds its most genuine legitimation in its transcendental function: its ability to nourish, awaken and sustain the human inclination to act, think, live, fight and possibly die in the name of something which transcends mere individuality.' In *Men Among the Ruins*, I emphasised the transcendental principle (i.e., that principle which leads upwards) by contrasting it with its opposite: 'transcendence by descent' – a feature of the state of the masses, of collectivism and demagogic fervour.

A further distinguishing trait of the true state, I argued, is its organic unity. For the true state exists as an organic whole comprised of distinct elements, and, embracing partial unities, each possesses a hierarchically ordered life of its own. At the basis of the true state, therefore, lie the values of quality, of just inequality and of personality: the fundamental principle of such a state being the Classical principle of *suum cuique* ('to each his own and to each his own rights' in accordance with natural dignity). Hence the sharp contrast between the organic state and the totalitarian: for the latter necessarily expresses a levelling, despotic and mechanistic kind of unity. The totalitarian state derives from the individualistic corrosion of the organic state: for once individualism has freed each person from what links him to higher powers, once 'freedom and equality' have destroyed all hierarchies, and a shapeless multitude has emerged amid a chaotic array of separate interests and forces - each aiming to gain ascendancy by all possible means; in such a context, the violence of 'totalitarianism' acts as a desperate means to impose some sort of external order by establishing a system which, nevertheless, stands as the materialist counterfeit of organic unity. I here recorded how the very process, which only recently unfolded on a vast scale, had already been recorded by Tacitus[25] in exact terms: 'To overturn the state (i.e., the genuine, organic, traditional state), they talk of freedom; once freedom will have been attained, this, too, they will attack.'[26] Likewise, Plato had observed that: 'Tyranny is born and takes hold from no other political system but democracy, which is to say that from extreme freedom, the most unmitigated and harsh slavery arises.'[27] I shall add one final quotation, taken from Vico: 'Men first desire freedom of the body, then freedom of character – which is to say freedom of conscience (the "immortal principles") – and wish to be equal to others; then they wish to dominate their equals; and finally, to trample on their superiors.'[28]

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[23] *Volk* is German for a people or nation. In a National Socialist context, the term was used in a broader sense, either referring to the Germanic peoples (of which the Germans were just a part), or the Indo-European peoples as a whole.

[24] *Volksgemeinschaft* was a term used by the National Socialists to designate the Germanic or European 'people's community' they were attempting to create.

In such a way, in *Men Among the Ruins*, I attempted to prevent any misunderstanding of the political ideals I was promoting. I raised further points concerning the distortion and belittling of the principle of authority. In particular, I distanced myself from the modern notion of 'dictatorship' – a system based on a shapeless and purely individual form of power – from 'Bonapartism'[29] and even from nationalism – for the ideal of the 'sovereign' nation was born of a collectivising process whereby 'matter' was removed from 'form' (the latter being the supra-ordained principle of the state). With this, I rejected all 'state worship', which is to say: any attempt to divinise and render absolute what is merely a political and secular idea lacking any transcendent authority. Finally, in *Men Among the Ruins*, I criticised 'one party' political systems on the grounds that a similar idea is a contradiction in terms: for the notion of 'political party' necessarily belongs to democratic and anti-organic ideology. Rather, I suggested, what one ought to aspire for is a kind of Order capable of safeguarding and protecting the State, and of acting as its backbone.

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[25] Publius Cornelius Tacitus (56?-117?) was a Roman Senator and historian who wrote a number of works, including one of the earliest accounts of the Germanic tribes.

[26] This passage appears in Book Six of *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1961).

[27] This passage appears in Book Eight of *The Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[28] This passage appears in Chapter 23 of *The First New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[29] Originally, in the Nineteenth century, Bonapartism was a term which referred to efforts to restore the French Empire under the leadership of the House of Bonaparte, which was founded by Napoleon in 1804. In more recent times, however, the term has come to refer to any political movement which seeks to establish a strong, centralised state which transcends the categories of Left and Right, and which is based upon populist support.

As for the more specific issue of the relation between the political and the economic spheres, I first considered the modern phenomenon of the 'demon of economy'. Such a phenomenon consists in 'the idea that what is truly important and decisive in human life, both individual and collective, are economic factors; and that the centring of all values and interests on the economic and productive plane represents not an unprecedented aberration in the life of Western man, but a normal, natural process: not something born out of brute necessity, but something desirable, to be accepted and praised.' The shady and closed circuit of the demon of economy stands at the very basis of both Marxism and capitalism: for both ideologies share a materialist view of life and materialist values. Therefore, I again pointed out that: 'It is utterly absurd for anyone today to wish to represent the political Right without first breaking free of such a circle by affirming and defending the legitimacy of higher ideals . . . What must be questioned is not the relative worth of a given economic system, but the place of economy as such . . . The contrast to be drawn is not that between capitalism and Marxism, but that between a system – such as the dominant one – which is ruled by economy (whatever form such rule might take), and a system in which economy is subordinate to other factors, and exists within a broader and more complete order capable of bestowing human life with meaning, and of allowing the development of the higher potentialities of man.' The primacy of politics over economy in the true state constitutes an attempt to check the kind of destructive processes that have now come to prevail. The practical implementation of such principles, I argued, was to lead to the 'de-proletarianisation' of life: for 'spiritually proletarian qualities are found where the only conceivable human type is that of the "worker", where there is much talk of "the ethics of work" and praise of the "state based on work", where no one dares to decidedly oppose the new and polluting myths, on the basis of which a veritable religion fit for beasts of burden has been founded.' To cut things short and address the so-called 'social problem' once and for all, I quoted Nietzsche: 'Workers are destined to live like the bourgeoisie one day – yet *at a higher level* than the bourgeoisie, for, thanks to their freedom from want, workers will shine forth as the highest caste: a poorer and more simple caste than the bourgeoisie, but one in possession of power.' In a similar context, the only legitimate revolution, I argued, is the one led from above. In a specific chapter of *Men Among the Ruins*, I described the way in which economic processes might be shaped by a restoration of ethical and virile values. I here described a scenario in which each 'working unit' (as I termed it), freed from the intoxication of class prejudice, fosters new organic and hierarchical relations based on personal contacts and solidarity, thus awakening the ancient corporative ethos. In this chapter of the book, I also described the political and institutional counterparts of such a system.

There is no need for me to provide more than a summary outline of the various other matters I discussed in *Men Among the Ruins*. In one chapter, I criticised the irresponsible choice of allowing the population to increase – population growth being itself a cancer responsible for much of the present chaos. I here newly raised many of the points which years earlier had led the Fascist authorities to seize one of the issues of my magazine, *La Torre*. In a different chapter of the book, I censured 'historicist' ideology and morality, while further elucidating the general bases of my counter-revolutionary and traditionalist ideas. I also felt the need to spend a few words on the issue of 'militarism', in order to clarify the typically bourgeois and democratic misunderstanding which leads people to confuse such a genuine deviation with a given *ethos*[30] that can certainly take the form of a warrior inclination, but which can also provide the foundations for a virile society and for a general approach to life. Other sections of the book lay a similar emphasis on the rejection of bourgeois society, culture and customs – a rejection which ought to be no less radical than the one operated by Marxism and Communism, albeit from an opposite perspective. I later further developed such ideas from a rather different angle in *Ride the Tiger*. In other chapters of *Men Among the Ruins*, instead, I returned to ideas I had previously discussed, such as the notion of 'occult war'. In particular, I dwelt on the weapons employed in such a war, which is to say: on the various tactics adopted by the forces of global subversion in order to secretly and indirectly influence the course of world history. The second part of this chapter presents a paper I had first delivered in Berlin before a restricted audience composed of SS leaders (the paper had later been printed in the pages of Léon de Poncins' French magazine *Counter-Revolution [Contre-Revolution]*). In such a way, with *Men Among the Ruins*, I sought to provide a genuine perspective that might replace the whims of historicism and progressivism – which are usually only the smokescreen of a process of destruction. In yet another chapter of the book, I returned to some of the points I had raised in my book on racial doctrine (a book that is now out of print and hard to come by). I here discussed the issues of Latinity and Romanness, of the Mediterranean character, and of what sorts of style and behaviour ought to be privileged in an attempt to rectify the Italian people.

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[30] Latin: 'ethics'.

As my treatment of certain ideas would not have been complete without a discussion of elective affinities and personal inclinations, I devoted one of the chapters of *Men Among the Ruins* to the issue of the 'choice of traditions'. I here denounced the distortions operated by a 'patriotic historiography' of a Masonic and liberal bent which aims to portray subversive and anti-traditional events as an integral component of the Italian tradition. As an example, I mentioned the rise of the Italian city-states,[31] a historical event often described almost as a fight against 'the foreign invader' rather than as that which it truly was: a democratic revolt against the legitimacy of the feudal caste and imperial authority – as if Italians, too, as Ghibellines, hadn't fought against the city-states. After examining the more problematic aspects of the Renaissance, I then turned to the Risorgimento, which I described, in its taste for the ideals of the French Revolution and Freemasonry, as a manifestation of the bourgeois revolution which had swept across Europe. Finally, I debunked the myths which, at the time of the First World War, had led Italy to abandon the Central Powers in favour of an intervention alongside Western democracies. If, I argued, such a 'tradition' has regrettably come to play an influential role in the history of Italy, then the Italian people have ceased to embody the symbolism and ideals of Rome. It nevertheless still remains possible to point to a different tradition, marked by a different 'inner race'. I here turned once more to the issues of Ghibellinism and Catholicism, with particular regard to the problems faced by those individuals for whom I intended to provide guidance.

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[31] The rise of the Italian city-states began in the Eleventh century. City-states arose throughout Europe at the time due to an increase in population, wealth and commerce, but in most areas, they were absorbed into the existing feudal system. This was not the case in northern Italy. Also in the Eleventh century, the Investiture Controversy began, which was the dispute between the Pope and the Holy Roman Empire which led to the rise of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Milan led a battle of the Italian city-states for independence from the Empire which succeeded. As a result, by the Twelfth century, the Italian city-states were independent political entities with a strong inclination toward republican forms of government.

A legitimate opposition to Catholicism, I argued in this section of *Men Among the Ruins*, cannot be based on the idea of the sovereign right of the secular and agnostic state – which is to say: on merely temporal power. True Ghibellinism is founded on the ideal of the true state: a state which possesses spiritual authority. Leaving aside the strictly political aspect of the question, an antithesis can no doubt be seen to exist between the values that mark the true state and some of the central aspects of Christian morality and Christian religion. In particular, I here acknowledged the fact that, especially in Latin countries, traditionalist and counter-revolutionary forces had often found support in Catholicism, which had at one time blessed the pure ideal of sovereignty and authority (I here had the counter-revolutionary or 'reactionary' alliance of throne and altar in mind). Yet today, this no longer appears to be the case: for, from the point of view of doctrine, official Catholicism appears little inclined to lend itself to 'traditionalist' integration on a truly universal and transcendent level (as Guénon – among others – had hoped). Therefore, I could only paraphrase the words I had used in a previous book of mine: 'He who follows Tradition merely on account of his adherence to Catholicism (in the prevalent and orthodox sense of the term), is only following Tradition halfway.' From a socio-political perspective, contemporary Catholicism also gives proof of a 'choice of traditions' in tune with the times: for it privileges democratic and social tendencies, and rejects what some of its representatives, using truly Enlightenment and Masonic language, have termed 'outdated Medieval remnants'. In this regard, I wrote that: 'If Catholicism today, being aware of the critical times to come, were to have the strength to decidedly break with the plane of contingency, and to pursue ascesis; if, by resuming the spirit which marked the most luminous features of the Medieval Crusades, Catholicism were to turn faith into the soul of a united and inflexible front aimed at opposing the modern forces of chaos, corrosion, subversion and political materialism, there would be no doubts on the matter. But unfortunately, the situation is very different.' Hence, one of the central questions concerning the prospect of a traditionalist restoration remained open.

A similar problem is discussed in the final chapter of *Men Among the Ruins*, entitled 'One Europe: Form and Premises'. Here, in considering the prospect of the unification of Europe, I once again emphasised the ideal of organic and hierarchical unity, rejecting the democratic idea of a merely economic association. The basic premise for the unification of Europe, I argued, must rather be the organic integration of all European states: unity must first be accomplished at a higher level. Consequently, nationalism and nationalist hubris – what Vico termed 'the haughtiness of nations' – must be overcome – as, besides, the nature of the 'true state' itself implies. A supra-ordained authority, one recognised as such, ought to act as the bond and centre of a system conceived as an 'organism composed of other organisms'. A limitation of the sovereignty of individual states is only acceptable – I suggested – if it serves the interests of such a 'legally pre-eminent' authority. An analysis of this kind, however, faced two main problems: one problem regards the foundation of the authority advocated; the other, the extent to which a similar authority might be recognised or even simply conceived in our day, given both the dominant spiritual milieu and the lack, within Europe, of a unitary living tradition of other than a merely profane and 'cultural' character. I then argued in the book that if any hope still exists to unify Europe, this lies in the prospect of an alliance between two categories of men who, across the continent, are 'standing among the ruins'. The first category is that of the members of ancient European families, who ought to prove worthy of their name (I here outlined the prospect that the latent heritage of the blood and 'race' of these people might awaken). The second category I identified with all the individuals who have experienced the destruction which has marked our times – both during and after the war – without succumbing; individuals aware of the illusionary nature of past and present ideologies, possessing a greater sense of reality, and capable of pure action. Such people, I argued, ought to share a sense of existential solidarity which transcends frontiers and conflicts of the past. Were these two categories of men ever to meet, and manage to take the place of the feeble and inconsistent 'political leaders' of their countries, a traditionally, organically united Europe would become a foreseeable prospect: a Europe united not by material – and as such contingent – factors, but by a higher ideal and authority; a new Europe which would prove strong enough to face the threat posed by the Eastern Bloc.

Men Among the Ruins was published with a foreword by Prince Valerio J. Borghese,[32] a man well known for his exploits during the last war. Prince Borghese had been at the head of the Italian Navy – which, in a most daring operation, had managed to sink two English battleships, along with other vessels, at the port of Alexandria; he had later fought to the very end as the commander of a military body known as the Decima MAS.[33] The association of Prince Borghese's name with my own was of great symbolic significance: for both of us had freely pursued our ideals and shunned petty politics; while Borghese embodied the fighting spirit, I was the theorist of a specific view of the Right. A similar association, I believed, might perhaps foster the kind of forces necessary for the kind of political front I had in mind. Besides, Prince Borghese and I had planned the publication of a new magazine provocatively entitled *The Reactionary (Il Reazionario).* At that time, the Movimento Sociale Italiano generally represented the largest organisation for those who had never repudiated the past and who rejected democracy. Such a party, however, embodied a number of different tendencies – not least because of the equivocally republican and 'social' bent of the 'Fascism of Salò' (hence the use of the term 'social' – 'Sociale' – in the party's name). I was then conscious of the need to create a current, within the Movimento Sociale Italiano, capable of genuinely expressing the ideals of the Right, and of attracting those individuals of a similar disposition which, for various reasons, had so far refused to enter the organisation. My desire was not to establish a new political party, but rather to educate the members of a new Order. Political parties, I argued, are not of any value in themselves: however, they can serve as a tool within the transitory system of parliamentary democracy (besides, as is generally known, this is also how the Communist Party envisages its own role). Our second aim would have been to organise – just as Communists might – forces capable of acting in an emergency situation – in which case, all 'majority' consensus obtained in the democratic elections by means of universal suffrage, of the support of women, the bourgeoisie, Catholic and parish associations, etc., would melt like snow in the sun (the only potentially dangerous and efficient opposition coming from the armed forces of Communism and socialism). The scenario I proposed, therefore, was comprised of the following elements: a Right wing elite; groups ready for action; a political party playing a contingent and tactical role.

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[32] Prince Junio Valerio Borghese (1906-1974) fought in the Second Abyssinian War and the Spanish Civil War. During the Second World War, he commanded a submarine, and he remained loyal to Mussolini, allying himself with the Germans and the Italian Social Republic in 1943. After a period of imprisonment following the war, he was active in the MSI, and later formed the Fronte Nazionale (National Front) after he believed the MSI had moved too far away from Fascism. He was also part of Operation Gladio, which was a NATO stay-behind force set up throughout Western Europe to defend it from the Soviet threat. In December 1970, Borghese was allegedly the leader of the Golpe Borghese, supposedly a Fronte Nazionale coup against the Italian government which was called off by Borghese hours before it was supposed to begin. As a result, Borghese fled Italy for Spain, where he died. In addition to his foreword to *Men Among the Ruins,* his book about his war exploits, *Sea Devils* (London: A. Melrose, 1952), was also translated.

[33] The Decima Flottiglia MAS (Mezzi d'Assalto), or 10th Assault Vehicle Flotilla, was an elite Italian commando frogman unit with a distinguished service record. It transferred its allegiance to the Italian Social Republic along with Borghese in 1943, although it was mainly limited to anti-partisan actions on land during this period. During this time, it also became strongly ideological, pledging to rectify Italy's betrayal of Germany, and becoming very anti-Semitic. It was also fiercely loyal to Borghese personally – when Mussolini arrested Borghese with the intention of assuming command of the Decima MAS himself, the soldiers threatened to launch a coup. For more information, see Jack Greene's *The Black Prince and the Sea Devils: The Story of Valerio Borghese and the Elite Units of the Decima MAS* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004).

Such political plans were never implemented. The same is also true of my work in the field of monarchism. Revealing, in this respect, is the case of the magazine *Monarchy (Monarchia)*, which was founded by an old friend of mine, Guido Cavallucci. Cavallucci, who was the former President of the Monarchist National Union,[34] sought to defend the monarchist cause, while avoiding the limitations and intrigues of political parties. Only a couple of issues of *Monarchia*, to which I gladly lent my support, were ever published, however, because Cavallucci was faced with a dilemma: either to follow his own editorial line without any compromise and to continue to receive no funding whatsoever; or to obtain some funding by serving the interests of politicians. Edizioni dell'Ascia, the publishing house run by another friend of mine, Tommaso Passa, and which published *Men Among the Ruins*, followed a most interesting editorial line from the point of view of the Right. Yet they, too, fell short of funding (despite various promises which had been made): the only other volume they ever published was a revised edition of my translation of René Guénon's book, *The Crisis of the Modern World.*

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[34] The Unione Monarchica Italiana was founded in 1944 to support the reign of King Victor Emmanuel III. Even after the end of the monarchy in 1946, the group continued to support efforts to restore it until the death of Umberto II in 1983, after which it disintegrated. The organization was re-established in 2002.

Generally speaking, Italy seems to lack the prerequisites for a serious attempt at political and ideological rectification. Regrettably, the prevailing human type today is that of the petty politician, who remains as such even when he is fighting Communism and professing 'nationalist' ideas. Parliamentary intrigues have gradually tainted even the best men.

BACHOFEN, SPENGLER, THE 'METAPHYSICS OF SEX' AND THE 'LEFT-HAND PATH'

During these same years, after the war, I worked on various translations. I only published those translations that had some bearing on the ideas I personally promoted, however, under my own name.

Already in 1949, Bocca had published my translation of a selection of writings by J.J. Bachofen under the title of *The Mothers and Olympian Virility*. I had chosen to translate these extracts in order to provide an idea of Bachofen's work and ideas, which incidentally lent support to my own views. I have previously mentioned this book. In Italy, the work of Bachofen was generally ignored at the time. Occasionally, Bachofen was fleetingly quoted as the author who had 'made the discovery' of matriarchy: this, however, was in order to suggest that Bachofen's ideas had now been surpassed by new and more 'scientific' studies – something, of course, completely false. As I already mentioned, Bachofen's perspective is not limited to the idea of matriarchy, but embraces a broad morphology of civilisation, as well as a philosophy of history and myth. As for Bachofen's brilliant intuitions and his gift for synthesis – not to mention the organic character of his research, which is so different from that employed in academic and 'scientific' studies – they find no match in the works of later authors. Outside Italy, and particularly in Germany and Switzerland, Bachofen's writing had been 'rediscovered' at the time, and was praised as the work of a veritable master who had made notable contributions – even in terms of methodology – to the study of ancient history. Bachofen's most important books or extracts from his writings had been republished, and his influence had even reached contemporary political movements in their attempt to fight for a different worldview.

In translating and commenting upon chosen extracts from Bachofen, therefore, I sought to bring the work of this author to the attention of the Italian public. I had completed my book before the outbreak of the Second World War. At that time, I believed that the various categories Bachofen had defined in his study of the traditions, symbols and myths of the ancient world might also be applied to the study of the 'race of the spirit'. Thus, I argued, it is possible to define each man according to different, and rather defined types: the solar, Demetric, telluric, Aphroditean, Dionysiac, Amazonian, and so on. At the behest of a German editor, I had actually planned to provide a systematic discussion of this morphology. However, I later abandoned the idea and confined myself to the book in question.

Most notably, the book contains a translation of Bachofen's famous introduction to his main work, *Das Mutterrecht* – which I entitled 'The Epoch of the Mother and Its Overcoming'. This introduction provides an overview of Bachofen's own ideas, and defines the character, place, meaning and religious framework of 'gynaecocracy' in its various forms, including the transition from the paternal principle, and Apollonian and solar symbolism. Other sections of the introduction discuss various intermediate stages between the two models of civilization. The book also includes a second important and detailed introduction by Bachofen, that to *The Myth of Tanaquil (Die Sage von Tanaquil)*[1] – which I translated as 'Tanaquil,[2] Romanness, East and West'. In this introduction, Bachofen provides a summary of his work: an in-depth study of the evolution of Roman civilisation based on his own most important ideas. Here, Bachofen describes the birth and rise of Rome as a tenacious and victorious – if, in a way, concealed – fight of the paternal, Olympian and Uranian principle against the kind of life, spirituality, religiosity and law which marked pre-Roman Italy as a civilisation of the Mother and the Woman. Other extracts from Bachofen discuss issues such as the figures of Dionysus[3] and Apollo,[4] the Etruscans,[5] the concept of immortality according to the two opposite models of civilisation, Pythagoras, and the sacral nature of ancient sports. I also felt the need to include two significant extracts that I entitled 'Law and the World of Origins'. Here, Bachofen seeks both to provide a sort of 'in-depth psychological analysis' of juridical, political and social structures, and to prove that so-called 'natural law' – with all its democratic, egalitarian and socialistic implications – is not an independent and universal philosophical conception, but rather an idea deriving from a chthonic, lunar and feminine view of life: an idea, that is to say, which was born of the civilisation of the Mother, and which reflects the specific approach of such a civilisation – an approach contrary to that of a jurisprudence largely based on the paternal and virile principle, and preserving an essential contact with the ideal of the State and with the aristocracy. The implications of a similar approach are evident, starting from the idea that any doctrine of natural law, far from being superior – as many have suggested – to positive law in both ethics and humanity, represents a regressive phenomenon that is shared by all egalitarian, democratic, Communist and plebeian ideologies. The spirit that marks the doctrine of natural law is that of original telluric gynaecocracy (the 'feminine' background of this doctrine). Besides, it is interesting to note that the very first authors to provide a political theorisation of Communism had embraced a view similar to that of Bachofen – albeit from an opposite perspective – when referring to the ideas that an American named Morgan[6] had discussed in a rather trite, and almost exclusively ethnological, fashion. For such authors had sought to portray Communism – or at least the Communist ideal – as a 'return to human origins' (i.e., to the supposedly matriarchal and collectivist origins of humanity).

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[1] Both of these introductions are available in the aforementioned volume *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right.*

[2] Tanaquil was an Etruscan woman in the Seventh century BC who married Lucius Tarquinius Priscus. Tanaquil believed her husband would make a good leader, and encouraged him to move to Rome to pursue power, which he did. En route, an eagle stole away with Tarquinius' hat and then returned it to his head, which Tanaquil interpreted as a sign that he would become King. Her prophecy proved to be correct, as in Rome, Tarquinius befriended King Ancus Marcius, who appointed him to become guardian of his children. When the King died before his children were old enough to succeed him, Tarquinius became the fifth King of Rome.

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[3] Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, was the Greek goddess of wine who could induce states of ecstasy.

[4] Apollo, in both the Greek and Roman traditions, was a god associated with truth, healing and the arts.

[5] The Etruscans were the ancient peoples who inhabited Italy before the Classical Romans.

[6] Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) was a lawyer who also conducted research into ethnology. He became fascinated with the Native Americans and was initiated into the Iroquois tribe. In his book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington,

If truth be told, the publication of *The Mothers and Olympian Virility* only met some of the goals I had envisaged. As I already mentioned, the publication of this book contributed to reveal the lack of interest of the dominant culture in Italy for any such studies of origins, myth and spiritual history. While other people, in the years that followed the publication of the book, chose to discuss the work of Bachofen, they did so without any emphasis on Bachofen's specific worldview and approach to myth – the very elements I had emphasised in my own work, and sought to apply to a broader context.

In the same period, for Longanesi, I prepared a translation of Oswald Spengler's German book *The Decline of the West*. In my introduction to this volume, I discussed the relevance and limits of Spengler's book, which had been received worldwide with a great deal of interest at the time of its first publication. Spengler is one of those writers who rejected progressive and historicist whims, and showed awareness of the degenerate nature of the times in which we are living. In my introduction to *The Decline of the West*, I remarked that one of the greatest merits of Spengler was that of having contributed to the overcoming of the linear and evolutionary view of history, thus disclosing a vast, new intellectual horizon. The negative counterpart to this is Spengler's embrace of pluralism and historical relativism. According to Spengler, there is no 'civilisation' in general: only many distinct and discontinuous civilisations, each of which constitutes a closed unit that evolves like a biological organism following various stages: birth, youth, maturity, inevitable decline. This cycle, Spengler argues, is experienced by each and every civilisation following the same pattern. By contrast, I argued that a similar description is too simplistic, and that it only applies to the external

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DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1868), he compared his studies of the Native Americans with the tribal life of other cultures, and developed his theory of the Unity of Origin of Mankind, in which he believed he had identified the universal primordial social structure of humanity. He also came to believe in the necessity for continual progress in societies in order for them to survive, which he identified in modern times with technological progress, as described in his *Ancient Society* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1877). Marx and Engels were heavily reliant on Morgan's work when discussing tribal societies and social progress in their own theories.

and manifest side of each civilisation. Spenglerian morphology, I suggested, provides more of a psychological than a philosophical or metaphysical analysis of civilisations, and focuses on much misleading and secondary evidence. Yet, in my introduction to *The Decline of the West*, I also acknowledged that what truly matters is to be aware of the essential duality behind the plurality of civilisations, which is to say: of the opposition between traditional and 'modern' civilisations (or between traditional and 'modern' phases within a given civilisation). This dualism – which I had already examined in *Revolt Against the Modern World* – is reflected in Spengler's well-known contrast between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*: where the first term describes the aspects or phases of a qualitative, organic, differentiated and living civilisation, and the latter, those of a rationalistic, urban, mechanistic, shapeless and dispirited one. While Spengler's description of the physiognomy of *Zivilisation* (the degenerate, final phase of each cycle) appears rather convincing, his analysis of what defines *Kultur* – what I would term a traditional civilisation – proves partial and inadequate on account of both its lack of appropriate doctrinal points of reference, and its adherence to the very myths born of a *Zivilisation* (our own).

Spengler lacked any understanding of metaphysics and transcendence, which embody the essence of each genuine *Kultur*. Spengler's failings in this regard emerge most clearly in his attempt to relate *Kultur* to 'life', 'instinct', race and the 'maternal', irrational and almost subconscious substrate of being (as opposed to intellectualised and 'spiritualised' 'awareness') – an analysis that shows the detrimental influence of the modern philosophy of life and the irrational. In other works less centred on historical enquiry – most recently, in the essay entitled 'Symbolism, Myth, and Irrational Deviation' ('Il simbolo, il mito e la deviazione irrazionalistica'), which I first published in 1960 in the German magazine *Antaios*, and then reprinted in the pages of my book *The Bow and the Club* (*L'arco e la clava*) – I emphasised how similar ideas merely reflect the existential dissociation brought about by a degenerative process. This dissociation I defined as *Erleben*, a term that describes mere personal experience on the one hand – a regressive absorption in life – and an abstract kind of intellectual awareness on the other. 'Being' devoid of intellectual clarity and intellectual clarity devoid of being, I suggested, are but two fragments of a superior and pre-existent unity; and if this unity is not taken into account, any genuine understanding of the heart of each *Kultur* of the world of origins, of non-modern civilisations – proves impossible. If I specifically sought to make this point clear, it is because modern interpretations of symbolism and myth are pervaded precisely by this kind of irrationalist misunderstanding. Klages too, like Spengler, fell victim to such a misunderstanding, to the point of confusing the 'spirit' with simple *Verstand* – the abstract intellect, which Klages portrayed as being 'contrary to life' and the 'soul'. A similar case, as I previously mentioned, is that of Jung.

Out of kindness – but also because what I was writing was merely the preface to a translation – I refrained from pointing out all the mistakes and inaccuracies which abound in Spengler's work (to the point of outnumbering Spengler's correct observations). Particularly outrageous are Spengler's remarks on Buddhism and Taoism, and to a lesser extent Stoicism and Greco-Roman civilisation (which he describes as a mere civilisation 'of the body'). What deserved particular attention was Spengler's well-known idea of the 'Faustian man' as the final expression of Western *Kultur* and one of the major causes of the crisis of the West. (Elsewhere, I described the 'Faustian' impulse – along with the drive towards exploration and unlimited expansion that manifested itself with the rise of Humanism and the Renaissance – as the consequence of an external and 'horizontal' projection of the metaphysical tension which had previously been directed upwards.) On the other hand, I agreed with Spengler's analysis of 'Caesarism' as one of the defining traits of the more advanced stages of *Zivilisation*: for when an organic and qualitative civilisation has come to an end, and masses of rootless individuals have emerged, one witnesses the rise of violent forms of unity based on a shapeless and purely personal power devoid of all genuine authority (the 'great personalities' that rule an epoch of 'absolute politics'). I had already made similar remarks in my critique of 'totalitarianism' in the pages of *Men Among the Ruins*. (Naturally, any reference to Caesar[7] in the description of a similar phenomenon is one-sided, as it ignores other defining features of that great historical figure.)

Despite its conciseness, my discussion of Spengler's views in the translated edition of his chief work proved particularly opportune, given that my own ideas on the modern world had often been regarded as 'Spenglerian'. My points of reference are, instead, very different from those of Spengler – to the point that I can assuredly claim that Spengler's writing influenced me in no way. On the other hand, I already mentioned the crucial importance for me of the 'traditionalist' views chiefly embodied by Guénon.

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[7] Gaius Julius Caesar (100 BC-44 BC) was originally a Roman military commander who seized control of the Roman Republic after waging a civil war, becoming its dictator and transforming the Republic into the Roman Empire.

Another German book I translated was *Sex and Character* by Otto Weininger. An Italian edition of the work already existed, but it was of poor quality and incomplete; so, at the behest of Bocca, I produced a new translation. Weininger was one of the authors who had interested me the most during my youth. At first, I planned to write a lengthy introduction to the book in order to emphasise the importance of Weininger's theories on sex and women. I soon realised, however, that a simple introduction would not prove enough to adequately discuss the subject – which, besides, transcended the issues examined in the book itself. Hence, I made up my mind to discuss the matter in a separate work, which I published after the war under the title *The Metaphysics of Sex* (*Metafisica del sesso*). A first Italian edition of the book was published by Atanòr in 1958; two French editions were published (by Payot) in 1959; and a German edition appeared in 1962 (for Klett-Verlag). A third, revised edition was published by Edizioni Mediterranee in 1969. Regrettably, the French and German translations of the book are far from perfect. A number of recent personal experiences had contributed to broaden my horizons at the time, and to guide me towards specific aspects of the subject. *Metaphysics of Sex*, on the other hand, further develops certain ideas on sex I had outlined in my previous books (this is particularly the case with the issues of androgyny, and of sexual techniques of an initiatory and magical character).

The term 'metaphysics' is employed in the book in two ways. On the one hand, 'metaphysics' is philosophically understood as the search for a supreme meaning; on the other, it is used in an almost literal sense, to denote 'that which transcends the physical' – in this case, in the context of sex and sexual experiences. Frequently, in my treatment of the subject, the two meanings coincide. The basic premise of the book is once more an attempt to interpret what is below on the basis of what is above, in accordance with the traditionalist method of enquiry and traditionalist anthropology, which had already allowed me to rectify racial theory – and not vice versa, as has generally been the case with modern thinkers. On the basis of the assumption that humans have derived from animals, evolutionary science has sought to interpret sex and sexual instincts in essentially biological terms, whereby sex is seen to manifest physical and biological impulses aimed at the reproduction of the species in a human, and more or less sublimated, way. By contrast, I favoured an opposite interpretation based on an opposite premise: the idea that man is situated on an other than a merely animal and naturalistic level of existence (this rather being a lower level that man only reaches when he becomes 'removed from his own nature'). As for the way in which sex is described by psychoanalysts, I wrote: 'Precisely because contemporary psychoanalysis, by fostering a daemonic inversion, has frequently spoken of the sub-personal ground of all sexuality, I believe it is necessary to emphasise an altogether different ground: a metaphysical ground of which the former is merely a degraded version. This, then, is one of the chief goals of my book.' Finally, I emphasised that the sexual and erotic intoxication that pervades the contemporary world – as all other degenerate epochs – called for a treatment of the subject from a perspective that has almost been forgotten.

In my study, I first refuted various theories according to which sexual impulses are based on the reproductive instinct, and what Schopenauer has termed the 'character of the species', the 'pleasure principle' (i.e., pure lust), or simply hormones. Gradually, in the course of my analysis, the essential and, in a way, obscure nature of human sexuality – and sexual pleasure – emerged. At the basis of sexuality, I argued, stands the 'magnetism' of a kind of polarity, which engenders a drunken feeling of excitement and brings about a shift in consciousness. I here turned to various doctrines from the world of Tradition, such as the Far Eastern doctrine of *yin* and *yang* as the pure principles of masculinity and femininity – the very foundation of said magnetism. I provided other, similar points of reference in other chapters of the book, in order to shed light on various aspects of sexual phenomenology. Having thus clarified various misunderstandings and defined the fundamental aspects of the matter, I turned to investigate the 'metaphysical' nature of that magnetism which is the ultimate ground of all sexuality.

To find an answer to my questions, I turned not to biology, but to traditional myth. In particular, I considered the myth of the androgyne, which was given a significant – if far from unique – form by Plato, who, in the *Symposium*, presents the myth as the foundation of his own definition of sex.[8] The androgyne of Plato's myth embodies the complete, indivisible and immortal being. Its division engenders the two sexes. Ultimately, therefore, sexual impulse can be seen as an impulse towards the reintegration and reunification of the two parts of the androgyne: in other words, as the basic metaphysical drive of the individual to overcome the divided and conditioned state in which he finds himself, in order to restore the absolute and primordial unity of his own being. Hence, the defining trait of all sexuality is a kind of hyper-physical excitement not dissimilar from all other conditions that the ancient world regarded as potential paths leading to the direct experience of the super-sensible (as Plato himself clearly acknowledged).

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[8] In Plato's dialogue *Symposium*, the idea of the androgyne is presented in the words

Such, then, is the nature of sexuality when considered from a perspective capable of grasping what lies behind ordinary appearance. All other aspects of sexuality are to be measured in terms of devolution or descent: lust, the pursuit of mere pleasure, the instinct to breed, and brute sexuality in general – both among men and in lower species – are nothing but increasingly degraded, material and deviant expressions of genuine erotic rapture in which the fundamental meaning of sexuality – the need for self-confirmation and the aspiration towards the unconditioned – is obscured. Particularly significant is what I had already emphasised in other books of mine: the contrast between what remains the most genuine and profound purpose of sexuality – however strongly the subconscious clouds this purpose – and the process of physical procreation. Physical procreation weakens the impulse to pursue the higher aim of sexuality: the insignificant physical continuity of the species through the succession of perishable individuals here replaces the conception of a being capable of transcending the cycle of confined existence, and mere mortal life.

Part of the book is devoted to an investigation of 'cases of transcendence within profane sexuality' – which is to say: to a systematic study of all those features of profane, normal, deviant or ecstatic sex that reveal the more profound dimension of sexuality by allowing men or women, partially

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of the comic playwright, Aristophanes. Aristophanes relates that, in primeval times, individuals were actually spheres comprised of both the male and the female genders. The androgynes were more powerful than contemporary men, and waged war against the gods. Zeus, desiring to weaken the androgynes and thus secure the power of the gods, caused them to be split into two, creating the two genders as we know them today. As a result, the newly divided men and women were condemned to perpetually seek out their missing half, and many died of loneliness. Zeus, feeling pity, invented sex, thus allowing for at least a temporary healing of the wound.

or temporarily, to transcend the limits of ordinary consciousness. This form of transcendence is revealed – particularly in the shock of orgasm – by an impulse of a metaphysical character, which – as in the case of uplifting passion and rapt pleasure – constitutes something more powerful than any ordinary norm, principle, value or institution. This is where the aforementioned 'metaphysics' of sex come into play. In the book, for the purpose of my enquiry, I examined issues such as the relation between pleasure and pain, the duality of life and death, sadism, masochism, fetishism, orgiastic phenomena, certain aspects of puberty, the idea of 'eternal love', the implications of jealousy and shame, as well as the language of lovers and certain cases pertaining to the sexual act and orgasm.

This research of mine would certainly have benefited from the specialised contribution of a neurologist or gynaecologist (assuming the necessary points of reference were not ignored). My study of sexuality in the book was integrated with a parallel research into the ancient or non-Western understanding of the higher levels and potentialities of love and sex. This is where the idea of the sacred – or even of mysticism, initiation and magic – came into play. It is in the context of this wider domain – a domain generally ignored in our time – that what sporadically and tentatively surfaces, even in the case of ordinary expressions of sexuality, manifests itself in a new light and reveals its true, hidden significance.

On the other hand, this parallel research led me to approach a subject I chose to discuss in a different section of *The Metaphysics of Sex*, a section entitled 'Gods and Goddesses, Men and Women'. In this section, I sought to examine certain matters from a perspective opposite the common one. I here examined the 'mythology of sex': the world of gods, of metaphysical and cosmogonic principles, and of the symbolism that various traditions have employed to express the sexual differentiation of male and female. Naturally, this symbolism has commonly been interpreted as a mere reflection of human reality: as an imaginary projection of the ordinary reality of sexual differentiation on a mythological level. The man of Tradition, however, has always seen such matters in a very different light: gods and goddesses he has regarded as real powers and entities; human differentiation into male and female as simply a reflex, and a more or less conditioned manifestation of such divine 'archetypes'. It is by turning to the divine that the man of Tradition has sought to discover the mystery and meaning of sex: by referring to a domain both anterior and superior to the ordinary manifestations of sex on a human and animal level.

It is thus by studying divine sexuality – a sexuality dramatised by the various myths and doctrines of Tradition – that I sought to describe the realm of sex, and to define the notions of 'absolute man' and 'absolute woman', along with the various ideal ways in which male and female can be seen to differ from one another, regardless of their ordinary individual manifestations. So, for instance, the figures of Demeter[9] and Aphrodite[10] (or Durga[11]) can be seen to embody the role of the woman as mother and lover. I here had the chance to discuss and develop some of the views of Weininger. Besides investigating the morphological differentiation of the sexes – albeit in a rather distorted way due to a misogynist, puritanical and sexophobic bent – Weininger had pointed to the methodological need to provide an *a priori* and universal definition of 'absolute man' and 'absolute woman' that could serve as the foundation for the study of concrete men and women – as human individuals hardly ever belong to one gender alone, but rather embody a composite mixture in which each gender is present to a certain degree. I also borrowed and further developed Weininger's idea of the basic law of sexual attraction.

Another aim of my investigation of 'sexual mythology' was to discuss traditional doctrines and practices that are based on the notion that the god and goddess (i.e., the pure masculine principle and pure feminine) are present – albeit in a latent and only potential form – in each man and woman. This led me to examine two specific issues. The first issue is that of sexual consecration: a consecration that takes place in symbolic, ritual, religious and institutional contexts, by means of various rituals focused on the union of man and woman – ranging from the wedding within a clan (*gens*[12]) to the practice of holy prostitution. The second issue I examined concerned personal experiences and real acts of evocation: I here discussed the more profound and transcendent potentialities of sex in the context of the effective – almost magical – evocation of the male and female archetypes (those of the god and goddess, the absolute man and absolute woman). For the purpose of this investigation, I collected wide documentary evidence, ranging from the initiatory (rather than vaguely 'mystical') experiences of the 'Fedeli d'Amore' of the Middle Ages, to certain cases of demonology. Here, again, I emphasised the fact that similar processes of evocation and transfiguration can also take place – albeit in a partial, unconscious or tentative way – in ordinary acts of love, provided that adequate intensity is present.

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[9] Demeter was the Greek goddess of fertility.

[10] Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love and beauty.

[11] Durga is the Hindu goddess who is considered to be manifest in acts of fearlessness or patience.

[12] *Gens* is Latin for clan. In ancient Roman society, members of a *gens* believed that they shared common ancestry. They were both patriarchal and patrilineal. In the Roman method of naming, an individual's second name was his *gens*.

The final section of *The Metaphysics of Sex* is entitled 'Sex and the Realm of Initiation and Magic'. This section examines the issues I have just outlined in more radical, and almost unprecedented, terms. I here discussed those (almost invariably secret) doctrines that promote sexual union with a woman as the means to evoke the destructive and 'transcendent' power latent in sex, a power that is then used to transcend the ordinary level of conditioned consciousness (which, of course, is the ultimate aim of every initiation). For the purpose of investigating such doctrines, I focused on the evidence provided by esoteric groups that had once operated in India, China, and – to a lesser extent – in the Islamic and Jewish worlds; I also sought to trace the survival of these doctrines among certain contemporary authors and organisations. Besides examining the use of sexual practices for ecstatic and initiatory purposes, I also considered the 'magical' use of sex as a means to bring about paranormal phenomena ('magic' here being used in the ordinary and inferior sense of the term). I was later to address these issues once more in my introduction to the Italian edition of A.B. Randolph's[13] book *Magia Sexualis* (which was published in 1967).[14]

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[13] Evola was slightly mistaken. The author was actually Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), an American medical doctor of mixed European and African ancestry, which led him to support the Abolitionist cause. He travelled widely, which is where he acquired his interest in mysticism, acted as a medium, and joined the Spiritualist movement. He is credited with being the first person to introduce the idea of sex magic in North America. He also founded the Fraternitas Rosae Crucis, which was the first Rosicrucian Order in the United States, and which still exists today.

[14] *Sex Magic,* or *Magia Sexualis,* was a French edition of selections from Randolph's published and unpublished writings on the subject, which became popular in avant-garde circles. The book was first published in Paris in 1931 by Maria de Naglowska, a Russian Satanist, feminist and occultist who was associated with the Dada movement in France. According to

It is worth noting that the examination of certain secret practices – particularly Tantric practices – in *The Metaphysics of Sex* provided further confirmation of what I had written in my introduction to the book: that sexuality is not determined by mere physiology, that it 'transcends' reproductive instincts.

In the conclusion to *The Metaphysics of Sex*, I emphasised that the chief purpose of my book was to broaden the reader's intellectual horizons. I had made the same point in other books, books of a different kind, yet marked by the same crucial references to doctrines and worldviews now largely forgotten. Apart from much new information, I argued that what readers – and only some readers, at that – might gain from a similar broadening of intellectual horizons was an awareness of the fact that contemporary manifestations of sexuality – usually primitive, degraded and even morbid manifestations – are not simply 'normal', possible and real. I suggested that in the case of more qualified individuals – whether male or female – the doctrines and perspectives described in *The Metaphysics of Sex* might provide the means to solve various personal problems, and to find a way out of the baseness of ordinary human existence. On the other hand, I pointed out that, given the present condition of humanity, one should generally hold no illusions with regard to the possibilities of realising the truly transcendent potentialities of sexuality – although sex certainly remains 'the greatest magical power in nature'. Even in those cases today where sex has not been trivialised or corrupted and turned into a consumer product, it is chiefly sought after as a means to experience cheap thrills: as a means to grant 'those who have taken the road to perdition an illusory, obscure, desperate relief from disgust and existential anguish'. What I had in mind here was the role that sex – not unlike drugs – plays for the new 'burnt out', heedless generation of *beats* and *hippies*, who are foolishly seeking the genuine meaning their life lacks in exasperated forms of sensuality.

By discussing sadism and its more profound significance in the light of

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Randolph's biographer, John Patrick Deveney, Evola became personally acquainted with de Naglowska during his Dada period. He also says that *Magia Sexualis* contains some material that cannot be found in any of Randolph's extant works, and that were probably added by de Naglowska herself. Evola himself briefly discusses de Naglowska, as well as Randolph, in *Metaphysics of Sex* (a.k.a. *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*). An English edition of the work has been published under Randolph's name as *Sexual Magic* (New York: Magical Childe Pub., 1988).

the metaphysics of sex, I again came to touch upon the subject of 'The Left-Hand Path'. The legitimacy of this path derives from the traditional doctrine of the three aspects of divinity: the creative, protective and destroying – destruction manifesting the transcendence of the ultimate principle beyond all limited and conditioned forms. The 'Right-Hand Path' is connected to the first two aspects of the divine; on the level of ethical and religious conduct, this path is characterised by the affirmation and consecration of existence, and by conformity to the laws and positive norms of a given traditional order operating on earth. By contrast, the 'Left-Hand Path' pertains to the third divine principle, that of pure transcendence; this path potentially implies not only a break with all existing order and norms (as in the case of pure ascesis), but also the destruction of such norms and order by means of a disregard for values and ethics, and a destructive release aimed at the attainment of the unconditioned. That of the 'Left-Hand Path' is the perspective I focused on the most in *The Metaphysics of Sex*. In discussing gender ethics in the book, I referred to what I had already written in *Revolt Against the Modern World* with regard to the traditional understanding of the institutional union of man and woman (in the context of the 'Right-Hand Path'). Nevertheless, *The Metaphysics of Sex* chiefly examines sex in itself, as a pure and potentially destructive experience (capable, that is, of bringing about a sudden, striking change): a perspective that rules out the possibility of any subordination of sex to merely human – or even social and biological – interests. Besides, I was later to favour the perspective of the 'Left-Hand Path' in my book *Ride the Tiger*, on account of both the character of the age we live in, and of the negative conclusions I had reached with regard to the possibilities for any rectifying, reconstructive or creative action (i.e., of any action in line with the 'Right-Hand Path') in a world and society, such as ours, which is approaching the end of a cycle. In this epoch of widespread decomposition, I argued, the only path one can attempt to follow is that of the Left Hand – with all the risks this entails.

From the 'Worker' to 'Ride the Tiger'

Before turning to *Ride the Tiger*, I should mention two minor works that I published in the last phase of my career. The first is *The Pythagorean Golden Verses*[1] (*I Versi d'Oro pitagorei*), published for Atanòr in 1959. In all truth, I only worked on this short book because the editors had requested me to do so: for Pythagorean doctrine does not really meet my taste. I agree with Bachofen that Pythagorean doctrine chiefly reflects the pre-Indo-European and Pelasgian[2] 'civilisation of the Mother'; I also believe that to some extent it reflects the Etruscan substrate of pre-Roman Italy. Yet Pythagorean doctrine – which is to say: the collected evidence that constitutes our understanding of the subject – is more complex and more hybrid than that. As is generally known, the *Golden Verses* are a rather late collection of material – dated to the Second, or even Third or Fourth century AD; despite the degree of renown they enjoyed in certain milieus in Antiquity, the *Verses* merely espouse a series of moral principles of little doctrinal and transcendent value. My edition of the *Verses* offers one of the best available translations of the text (a translation that already featured in the pages of *Introduction to Magic*); in order to provide the reader with a general overview of the subject, the volume also includes a commentary and introduction that takes account of the most important surviving evidence on Pythagorean doctrine, including Hierocles' commentary on the *Verses*.[3]

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[1] Many translations of the *Golden Verses* exist. One of the most recent is Johan Carl Thom's *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995).

[2] Pelasgian is a term which refers to the ancient, pre-Hellenic inhabitants of Greece.

The hybrid character of Pythagorean doctrine might also be discerned from the actual presence within such a doctrine, and particularly in relation to the myth of Pythagoras, of features of the Apollonian or even Hyperborean tradition – which, in themselves, are far removed from the 'Woman Mysteries' that influenced Pythagorean doctrine in other respects. Among the Pythagorean elements that most clearly betray Indo-European and Hellenic origins, I mentioned the Pythagorean 'notion of the universe as cosmos: a composite and harmoniously ordered whole (Pythagoras, in fact, is regarded as the first ever to have used the term "cosmos").' To this I added the Pythagorean 'emphasis on limit, proportion and form; its doctrine of the harmonious unification of the various powers of the soul; its notion of eurhythmics;[4] its appreciation of and care for the human body (an element which stands in contrast to the Pythagorean – and originally Orphic[5] – view of the body as a prison); its experimental method of applying given principles – something that reflects the Pythagorean love of clarity and exactitude, and aversion to pseudo-metaphysical and mystical vagueness; its esteem for artistic beauty; its aristocratic and Doric conceptualisation of political power (Pythagorean emphasis on the doctrinal, rather than the warrior and regal foundations of power not withstanding); its affirmation of the ideal of hierarchy, at least with regard to true knowledge.' I here added 'at least' because in the social – as opposed to initiatory – field, Pythagoreans have generally been regarded as defending the doctrine of natural law[6] – a view that would also agree with the Pythagorean valorisation and divinisation of the feminine, and with other dubious views ascribed to the followers of Pythagoras. In contrast, it is interesting to note – as Hierocles himself has recorded – that Pythagoreans understood apotheosis[7] not as a vaguely mystical and pantheistic process, but as the divinisation and immortalisation of the individual – who, following apotheosis, would have been numbered among the gods. This view of apotheosis, if correctly ascribed to Pythagoreans, would bring Pythagorean doctrine into line with the Classical and Hellenic spirit – which contemplates 'heroic' forms of immortality; such a view also appears close to the initiatic doctrine concerning the so-called 'transformed' or 'perfect body' (i.e., the doctrine of 'resurrection'), a classic formulation of which was provided by Taoism (as I noted in my new edition of Lao Tzu's *Tao-té-ching*). Other sources, however, describe the Pythagorean conceptualisation of apotheosis in a way that suggests the influence of a worldview opposite from that of the Classical.

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[3] See *Commentary of Hierocles on the Golden Verses of Pythagoras* (London: Theosophical Pub., 1971).

[4] Pythagoras taught that the proportional ratios used for musical intervals are identical to other natural ratios, such as the motions of the celestial bodies, and that objects therefore emit a sound that correlates to their physical characteristics. This came to be known as eurhythmics.

[5] Orphism was a religion in ancient Greece which taught that mortals are condemned to live through an endless succession of lives in this world via the transmigration of souls.

[6] Pythagoreans believed that the gods had formulated one, unchanging law for the entire world, and that this law could be discerned only through intuition, rather than through reason or the senses.

The other work I completed in this period was *The Figure of the 'Worker' in the Thought of Ernst Jünger (L''operaio' nel pensiero di Ernst Jünger)*, which was published in 1960 by the editor, A. Armando (head of the publishing house 'Avio'). Someone had drawn my attention to a book published in the years between the two World Wars, a book entitled *The Worker: Dominion and Gestalt (Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt)*.[8] Its author, Ernst Jünger, was already well-known at the time thanks to various works which – by contrast to the defeatist and pacifist literature prevalent in the aftermath of the war – emphasised the potentially positive and spiritual aspects of modern warfare.[9] On this account, Jünger had even been labelled the 'anti-Remarque'.[10] Nor was Jünger a mere writer: having joined the Foreign Legion in his youth,[11] he had later volunteered to fight in the First World War, where he was repeatedly wounded and was awarded the highest military honours. Following the collapse of Imperial Germany, Jünger was held in high esteem in nationalist and combat circles, and soon emerged as one of the representatives of the 'Conservative Revolution' – the term I already used to describe those circles which I came to appreciate and collaborate with in central Europe.

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[7] Apotheosis, in Hellenistic Greece, was the process by which a mortal could become a god. Heroes could become gods, and rulers could also divinise themselves.

[8] *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg: Henseat. Verl.-Anst., 1932). It has not been translated into English. However, many of the ideas it contains are summarised in Jünger's own essay, 'Total Mobilisation', which is available in Richard Wolin (ed)., *The Heidegger Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

[9] In English, two of his books about the First World War have been translated: *Storm of Steel* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) and *Copse 125* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930).

[10] Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) was a German writer who served in the First World War. His most well-known work is his 1927 novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which depicted the war in horrific and pacifist terms. It has been translated.

[11] Jünger, while still in school, ran away from home in 1913 and briefly served in the

The starting point of Jünger's analysis in *The Worker* is the fact that modern warfare has unleashed elementary forces (where 'elementary forces' is used as it might be when talking of nature). Such elementary forces, Jünger argues, are related to that which is 'material'; i.e., to technical devices possessing an enormous destructive power (here the author speaks of 'material battles'). In the case of modern warfare, it is as if a non-human force had been awakened by man from which the individual soldier cannot escape: a force he must rather face by attempting to stand up to the very machines he serves, spiritually as well as physically. This is only possible if the individual takes on a new form of being by forging a new human type capable of grasping the absolute meaning of existence in a context that would prove destructive for any other person. In order to achieve such a goal, the character, ideals, myths, values and worldview of the bourgeois world must be transcended.

Jünger had sought to apply his analysis of modern 'total war'[12] to the context of modern existence in general: for the rise of technology and mechanisation, Jünger argued – and the various phenomena which this rise entails – will lead to a similar unleashing of 'elementary forces' and destructive, frightening processes, whereby the tools of science and technology, which man has created to conquer nature, will backfire. Jünger here examined similar issues to those he had examined with regard to modern warfare. Having ascertained the impossibility both of relying on previous norms and values, and of avoiding the process underway, Jünger pointed to the need for developing a new human type capable of actively facing destruction: capable, that is, of being the perpetrator rather than the victim of destruction. Destruction, according to Jünger, would thus have to be accepted as a means to overcome what is merely human: as the means to attain a new 'heroic sense

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French Foreign Legion in Algeria, until his father persuaded him to return home.

[12] Total war as a concept refers to warfare in which the combating nations devote all available resources to the conflict, including human resources, meaning that little, if any, distinction is made between soldiers and civilians.

of reality' which would replace hedonism and the pursuit of happiness as the chief driving force of life. This heroic sense of reality and impersonality would contribute to differentiate humanity once more, while transcending the antitheses and problems of the bourgeois world and its degenerate features. The new type of man destined to stand out physically from the rest as a new 'figure' in world history – a figure destined to act as the centre, foundation and ruler of the technical age – Jünger termed the 'worker' (*der Arbeiter*) – hence the title of his book. No doubt, Jünger ought to have chosen a better term, for his 'worker' does not describe a social class – the working class – nor does it have anything to do with the Leftist idea of the industrial proletariat. Rather, Jünger's term 'worker' refers to a broad human type which shares certain traits with both the ascetic and the warrior, and affirms its way of being with detachment and clarity in all aspects of life. In his book, Jünger describes the present age as an age of transition (something, he suggests, in between a museum and a construction yard), and outlines various prospects for the future role of the 'worker', not least in the realm of politics. Jünger here defends the ideal of hierarchy and talks in terms of a new Order. As this Order is described by Jünger as being both 'Spartan' and Prussian, as reminiscent of both the Jesuits[13] and the Communist elites, it is clear that what the author has in mind are the values that have surfaced in the past, and are surfacing today among movements which are situated on the opposite side of the political spectrum, yet share a rejection of bourgeois and democratic values.

I had long wished to make Jünger's book known in Italy by publishing its translation. Yet in reading Jünger's work again, I realised that a mere translation would not have sufficed: for the book mixes many interesting sections with others that might confuse the inexperienced reader (for they refer to certain past events in Germany, while lacking any reference to other issues of dramatic importance for the present). Besides, Jünger's book presented certain editorial difficulties. I therefore abandoned the idea of a mere translation and opted for a synthesis of Jünger's theories. While I made extensive use of Jünger's own writing in my study, in order to develop a more critical and interpretive framework, I avoided quoting the extraneous or spurious parts of Jünger's book, and attempted to emphasise its most essential and relevant points. As for my own critical contribution to Jünger's theory, I pointed out that the sense of euphoria and prosperity that pervades the 'Western' world today would seem to have deprived the figure of the 'worker' of those alarming conditions necessary to its affirmation. And yet, I noted, there is no doubt another side to our 'Atomic Age' or 'Second Industrial Revolution': for the times of peace we are living in show all the signs of being an armistice. Besides, the necessary conditions for the rise of the 'worker' will continue to exist not externally, but in the form of internal acts of destruction and elementary forces in revolt against the current order (particularly if this order has been rationally, perfectly planned). If I ever criticised Jünger in my book, it was rather for his ambivalent description of the 'worker': for such a figure runs the risk of merely expressing a form of activism and self-development devoid of any transcendent character capable of engendering new and legitimate hierarchies. On the other hand, the attainment of a superior dimension of this kind is not a likely prospect; for the younger generations are increasingly coming to reflect the kind of worldview and perspective favoured by modern science: a perspective that lies at the basis of modern technology (and thus of our own twilight civilisation), and which denies the very possibility of transcendence.

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[13] The Jesuits are a Catholic order which has always been known for its emphasis on self-conquest, detachment and devotion to pure Catholic doctrine.

In *The Worker* (as well as in a more recent book entitled *At the Wall of Time*[14]), Jünger has mentioned the as-yet unperceived 'metaphysics' that lie at the basis of the world of machines and technology, and that will one day surface and come to prevail. Other authors have recently voiced similar ideas: a notable example is that of Pauwels[15] and Bergier[16] in *Le matin des*

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[14] *An der Zeitmauer* (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1959). It remains untranslated. After the time that Evola was writing, Jünger further modified the ideas he had expressed in *Der Arbeiter* in a work entitled *Maxima-Minima: Additional Notes to 'The Worker* (*Maxima-Minima: Adnoten zum 'Arbeiter'* [Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983]). It is also untranslated.

[15] Louis Pauwels (1920-1997) was a French author and journalist, and a follower of Gurdjieff, who became known in the 1960s as a writer and publisher of popular writings on occult matters and science fiction. Despite the slanders he published about Guénon and other associated figures at the time, in 1978 he began publishing the *Figaro-Magazine*, which became a forum for New Right thinkers such as Alain de Benoist. In 1982 he returned to Catholicism.

[16] Jacques Bergier (1912-1978) was a Russian Jew whose family fled to France following the Russian Revolution. He conducted research into nuclear physics, and then was active in the French Resistance. By the late 1950s, he had joined his friend, Louis Pauwels, in his

magiciens[17] – a book that has attracted quite a lot of attention. Similar ideas, however, strike me as mere whims – unless the term 'metaphysical' is here understood in its literal meaning of 'that which lies beyond the physical' in which case the emergence of non-physical forces might be seen to refer to the affirmation of a mechanistic and technological world: a 'daemonic' rather than truly 'metaphysical' event. Thus, in the conclusion to my book on Jünger's theories, I suggested that without an actual 'mutation' – in the sense the word possesses in the field of biology and genetics, where it refers to the development of new species – the figure of the 'worker', provided it ever comes into being, will hardly prove any different from the Communist ideal of the worker in materialist and collectivist terms. Here, I also remarked that the very use of the term 'worker' is questionable, for the idea of the 'worker' chiefly pertains to the fourth and final caste. It is revealing, therefore, that 'job' is a term so frequently used today that it even describes – and hence debases – activities which have nothing to do with the idea of a job – something I frequently emphasised in my own writing.

On the other hand, over the years Jünger has come to distance himself from the book I had introduced to the Italian public, and has abandoned his original views. While the most recent writing of Jünger has significantly contributed towards his fame as a writer and man of letters, on a spiritual level it reflects a lapse: both for its merely literary and aesthetic nature, and because it betrays the influence of ideas of a different, and often antithetical sort from the ones that inform *The Worker* and other early books of Jünger. It is as if the spiritual drive that Jünger had derived from his life in the trenches of the First World War, and applied on an intellectual level, had gradually run out. Besides, not only did Jünger play no significant role during the Second World War, but it also appears that, when in service in occupied France, he got in touch with those members of the Wehrmacht who in 1944 attempt-

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publishing efforts. They wrote several popular books on occult topics together.

[17] *The Morning of the Magicians* (New York: Stein & Day, 1964). This is the book which first gave rise to many of the false myths which persist today about a supposed 'occult conspiracy' at the heart of National Socialism, and, although Evola himself is not mentioned, many of his other acquaintances are unjustly implicated in it. Even René Guénon is said to be consistent with Nazi ideology. Evola addressed the misinformation contained in this book in his essay, 'Hitler and the Secret Societies', which is available at the *Tradition and Revolution* Web site (www.geocities.com/integral_tradition/hitler.html).

d to murder Hitler.[18] Jünger, therefore, should be numbered among those individuals who first subscribed to 'Conservative Revolutionary' ideas but were later, in a way, traumatised by the National Socialist experience, to the point of being led to embrace the kind of sluggishly liberal and humanistic ideas which conformed to the dominant attempt 'to democratically reform' their country; individuals who have proven incapable of distinguishing the positive side of past ideas from the negative, and of remaining true to the former.[19] Alas, this incapability to discern is, in a way, typical of contemporary Germany (the land of the 'economic miracle'[20]).

The following book I wrote, *Ride the Tiger*, partly returns to the issue of the 'worker', which it develops and integrates. This book essentially sprung from the negative conclusions I had reached from my experience and a realistic assessment of the present situation; its roots, that is, lie in my awareness of the fact that nothing can be done either to bring about a significant change at the present, or to halt a series of processes which, following the latest collapses, now have free rein. In particular, the incentive for me to write *Ride the Tiger* came from various people who had followed the 'traditional' phase of my career. These people had come to acknowledge the superior validity of a model of existence and society based on those traditional ideals I had emphasised in my writing (especially in *Revolt Against the Modern World*), and had sought to address the question of what might be done in a society and culture such as ours. I thus felt the need to outline a different approach for such people. I argued that any prospect of external reconstruction is to be abandoned, for it is unrealistic in the present age of disintegration: rather, I suggested, what ought to be addressed is the purely individual problem, which is to be solved in such a way that 'what I hold no power over, may hold no power over me.'

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[18] This is the famous assassination attempt of 20 July 1944 which was led by Col. Claus von Stauffenberg. Jünger was indeed in contact with several members of the conspiracy in Paris among the Prussian officers, including Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Like many of the Conservative Revolutionaries, he saw some hope in National Socialism in its early days, but quickly became disenchanted with it after 1933. Jünger, like most intellectuals who refused to embrace the movement, was regarded with suspicion by the Nazis, and he was kept under watch and harassed by the Gestapo. In 1939, Jünger publicly broke with the Nazis in his novel, *On the Marble Cliffs* (New York: New Directions, 1947), which is a thinly-disguised allegory condemning Nazi barbarism. After this, Jünger was banned from publishing by the Nazis. During the early 1940s, Jünger wrote a small book, *The Peace* (Hinsdale: H. Regnery Co., 1948), which condemned Nazism and outlined a proposal for a post-Nazi Europe which would engender a new, revitalised pan-European culture, and lead to world peace. This book was secretly circulated among Wehrmacht officers and no doubt was known to the conspirators. It is somewhat odd that Evola here condemns Jünger for his limited involvement in the plot, since, earlier in this same book, he expresses understanding toward those members of the Conservative Revolution who later turned against Hitler once they realised that National Socialism had become something inconsistent with their own ideals.

[19] Evola is being unfair to Jünger here. Jünger never repudiated any of his earlier works, not even the more controversial works like *Der Arbeiter*, although he was often under great political pressure to do so. He did further develop his ideas over the course of his life, however, and it is debatable whether or not the aristocratic anarchism that he advocated after the Second World War was consistent with his earlier writings as part of the Conservative Revolution. Still, it is the case that Jünger's repudiation of politics after 1945 is quite similar to Evola's own *apoliteia* stance, as outlined in *Ride the Tiger*. He certainly could never be classified as either a liberal or a democrat.

[20] The economic miracle, or *Wirtschaftswunder*, was a period in the early 1950s when the West German economy experienced a period of rapid growth, allowing it to fully recover from the devastation of the Second World War. This was due in part to the halting of inflation as a result of currency reform, and in part to the aid which West Germany was receiving from the United States through the Marshall Plan. It was seen as the first triumph of the new, democratic and capitalist Federal Republic of Germany.

Such, then, is the problem I tackled in *Ride the Tiger*: yet not from Everyman's perspective, but from the perspective of a given human type: the man of Tradition, the man who inwardly does not belong to the modern world, and whose fatherland and spiritual homeland lies in a *different* civilisation; a man, therefore, who possesses a specific interiority. Nor is this the only restriction of *Ride the Tiger*: in the introduction to the book, I point out that those whom I am addressing are not the individuals willing to wage a lost war, nor those possessing the inclination and material resources to abandon the contemporary world. Nor does the book address the few individuals called forth to act as witnesses by the publication of books or other means in order to ensure that at least the mere memory of different existential horizons and levels of being – as attested in the traditional past – might not be lost forever. Rather, *Ride the Tiger* is intended for all those people who cannot or do not wish to abandon the contemporary world, but are ready to face it and to experience it even in its most feverish aspects, all the while preserving a differentiated personality and avoiding any capitulation. It is precisely this approach which the expression 'riding the tiger' refers to: for the individuals in question are to take those forces that cannot be directly opposed upon themselves and neutralise them, along with those processes which have become unstoppable and irreversible. The forces and processes, therefore, which, for the overwhelming majority of our contemporaries, represent a cause of destruction, must firmly be allowed to act in such a way as to foster transcendence and liberation. In the book, the formula 'riding the tiger' merely applies to the inner problems of the individual – his behaviour, actions and reactions in an age of dissolution – and in no way pertains to either external goals or to the future (i.e., to the prospect of the end of the current cycle and the beginning of the new one). I here pointed out that if the theory of cycles – understood in a different sense from that outlined by either Spengler or Vico – represents an integral component of traditional doctrine, it nevertheless should not be treated as a crutch in the present day: for the prospect that 'those who have kept watch during the long night might greet those who will arrive with the new dawn'[21] remains shrouded in mist.

An important question I felt the need to address was the following: ours is often described as a time of crisis and decline; yet few attempt to define just what it is that is affected by this crisis and decline. Is it the world of Tradition? Certainly not. Rather, it is the world of the bourgeoisie, which represents the antithesis of the world of Tradition. Hence, the contemporary crisis might be described, in Hegelian terms, as a 'negation of negation': as a phenomenon, that is, not of an exclusively negative nature. The prospect we face is that this 'negation of negation' will either lead to nothingness ('either the kind of nothingness from which erupts the multiplicity of chaos, dispersion and revolt which characterises many trends of the younger generations, or that which is concealed behind the organised system of material civilisation'); or that it will lead, in the case of the kind of man I was addressing in *Ride the Tiger*, to the freeing of new space. In such a way, I both confirmed my opposition to the bourgeois world, and rejected the 'rule of residues': the futile attempt to oppose the various processes of dissolution that are currently underway by means of any surviving form of bourgeois life. I particularly felt the need to emphasise this last point, as certain individuals at the time were suggesting a strengthening of the aforementioned residues (in the form, for instance, of bourgeois Catholicism) with traditionalist ideas, without realising that any such attempt would merely serve to put traditionalist ideas at risk without accomplishing any concrete goal.

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[21] According to Evola, who uses it again in *Ride the Tiger*, this image is taken from Hugo von Hoffmanstahl.

My position on such matters also served as an implicit critique of the view that had been voiced in Guénonian circles concerning the 'need to adopt a traditional form of exotericism' (although I never explicitly referred to such matters in the book). The issue of exotericism perfectly serves to illustrate the tendency of similar groups to indulge in the discussion of abstract, normative principles while ignoring concrete reality. Guénon had argued that superior forms of knowledge ought not be pursued on a level removed from the general norms established by a positive tradition ('exotericism') – less still in opposition to, and in revolt against such norms. The two spheres – the exoteric sphere and the esoteric – Guénon suggested, ought to be complementary: so that an individual who is incapable of following 'exoteric' norms aimed at investing life with order and sacredness ought not attempt to pursue a higher path. The basic premise of *Ride the Tiger*, however, was precisely my realistic acknowledgement of the fact that it is impossible to follow such exoteric norms in the present day: for no positive, meaningful and truly legitimate institutions exist to provide a support for the individual. A 'consecration', therefore, of external, active life today can only derive from a free and genuine inner drive towards transcendence, rather than from given moral or religious norms. Hence, if – as might have been expected – I referred to traditional doctrines when examining the prospect of 'riding the tiger', it is the 'inner doctrines' of Tradition that I examined: those doctrines that, in traditional civilisations, were usually known to a privileged minority alone. What I was concerned with was the fact that traditionalism might serve as a tool for conformism. Plotinus' injunction *aphele panta* ('get rid of all') must serve as the motto of those capable of seeing the present in its true light. Hence, too, the central relevance of the idea of the 'Left-Hand Path' in our day.

These preliminary remarks led to the more general section of *Ride the Tiger*, entitled 'In the World Where God Is Dead'. In this section, I described the various phases that modern nihilism has gone through following the severing of all true bonds between man and the transcendent. Here, morality can be seen to lose all superior legitimacy – the surrogate morality based on the 'autonomy' of reason soon leading to social or utilitarian morality, and the process progressing until the existence of any genuine principle has been denied. As a counterpart to this process, man experiences the spiritual 'trauma' of his growing awareness of the absurdness and irrationality of existence: a feeling that characterises significant segments of the younger generations in their more anarchic, feverish and desperate manifestations. Likewise, I felt the need to denounce the nihilism implied by the economic myth prevalent both in the 'West' (the idea of prosperity) and in the 'East' (Marxism): a myth merely serving as a degrading anaesthetic to prevent the spread of existential crises in a world where God is dead.

In the same chapter, and for the last time, I examined Nietzsche, whose thought remains as valid today as it ever was. The central question Nietzsche raised was: What shall come *after* European nihilism? Or more exactly: Where shall it be possible to find an adequate meaning for life after having experienced nihilism – an awareness destined to produce irrevocable and irreversible results?

I do not wish to dwell on my analysis of the existential problem posed by Nietzsche in any detail. After all, if Nietzsche's definition of the problem is clear, the solutions he suggested are both hazy and dangerous – particularly in the case of his theory of the *Übermensch* and the will to power, and his naturalistic, almost physical praise of 'life'. To 'be oneself' and to follow one's own law as an absolute law can certainly be a positive and legitimate option – or, rather, the only remaining option: but this is true only in the case of the human type I addressed in *Ride the Tiger*: an individual possessing two natures, one 'personal' and one transcendent. The idea of 'being oneself', therefore – of achieving self-realisation and of severing all bonds – will have a different meaning according to what nature it is that expresses it. Transcendence ('that which is more than life'), understood as a central and conscious element present within immanence ('life'), provides the foundation for the existential path I outlined – a path that includes elements such as: 'Apollonian Dionysism' (i.e., an opening towards the most intense and diverse aspects of life, here experienced through the lucid inebriation brought about by the presence of a superior principle), impersonal activism (pure action that transcends good and evil, prospects of success or failure, happiness and unhappiness) and the challenging of oneself without any fear that the 'I' might suffer (internal invulnerability). The origin of some of these ideas should be self-evident to those who have followed my discussion so far.

In *Ride the Tiger*, I attributed Nietzsche's more ambiguous views, as well as various individual traits of his character and his fate, to the awakening of a form of transcendence that was never consciously and actively embraced by Nietzsche. Such a situation inevitably leads to tragedy and distortion, if not utter destruction. A similar case, after all, is that of existentialism, which I discussed in a different section of the book – existentialism, however, understood not as a philosophical system, but as a distinguishing trait of the times we live in. Again, the ground of existentialism is essentially a passive form of transcendence that is experienced 'unwillingly': here, the freedom achieved by the means of nihilism can be seen to turn against the 'I' – to the point that it was described by Sartre[22] as something to which we are 'condemned'. This process engenders disgust and an increased feeling of existential absurdity and non-involvement: a negative feeling of non-involvement, which is not marked by the calm presence of a superior principle. It is only natural, therefore, that existentialism has proven incapable of maintaining its position. In *Ride the Tiger*, I spoke of both the 'dead end' and 'collapse' of existentialism: on the one hand, a 'dead end' that – as in the case of Heidegger – leads one to envisage 'living to die' as the sole meaning of life – death being regarded as the sole means towards 'deconditioning' (as if any death might serve such a purpose!); on the other hand, a 'collapse' that leads individuals – such as Jaspers and Marcel[23] (among many others) – to turn to religious worship.

What I considered next in the book was the ambiguity of the whole process that began with Humanism and the Renaissance. Naturally, from the perspective of the philosophy of civilisation, this process is entirely negative: I here confirmed the points I had raised in *Revolt Against the Modern World*, and which are accepted by all traditionalists. However, I also pointed out that this very process might be seen as putting to the test certain individuals whom it historically affects with its nihilism (the test of fire or emptiness, as it were): for nothingness and freedom can either be the cause of inner defeat, or provide the incentive for the manifestation of a hidden and superior dimension of being. In the latter case, new inner developments occur, such as the transcendence of both theism and atheism: for the individual comes to realise that the only god who 'is dead' is the humanised god of morality and devotion, and not the god of metaphysics and traditional inner doctrines.

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[22] Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a French philosopher who, with the possible exception of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, wrote the most definitive formulation of the principles of existentialism in his book, *Being and Nothingness*. In his later works, he also attempted to produce a synthesis of Marxism and existentialism.

[23] Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was a French philosopher who, despite being classed as an existentialist by others, resisted the label himself, preferring the term 'neo-Socratic'. Marcel was initially an atheist, but converted to Catholicism in 1929. He was very concerned with the fate of the individual under the influence of science and technology, positing that the human individual is encouraged by science to think of himself as an object, thus being convinced to become complicit in his own destruction.

Following this more general discussion, *Ride the Tiger* considers what behaviour and approaches are to be adopted with regard to various aspects of contemporary culture and society. In each case, I here point to a given case of dissolution in order to suggest what benefits it might provide for the differentiated human type I am addressing. As for those modern processes which affect the individual (i.e., alienating processes), I raised similar points as those I had raised when discussing the work of Jünger: for I argued that such processes can serve to foster a new kind of impersonality and realism. The acknowledgment of the fact that modern science is merely practical, and that, despite all appearances, it embodies and brings about the dissolution of all true, living knowledge, potentially leads to the overcoming of all the myths of science; thus, as a means to inner awakening, it also potentially promotes direct contact with those elementary aspects of nature that transcend what is merely subjective and human (a process clearly far removed from the simple idea of a primitive or sporty return to nature – an idea that reflects the regressive character of our time). Here, I also briefly considered certain points raised in exclusively philosophical terms by so-called 'phenomenology' (Husserl's brand of philosophy): problems that, if adequately addressed, might lead to the kind of conclusions already reached by the inner doctrines of the world of Tradition with regard to the 'intellectual opening' of reality in its multiple dimensions and its symbolic significance. In yet another chapter of the book, I examined the sphere of culture proper: I examined modern literature, as well as the most recent developments in music, and jazz in particular, which is marked by the emergence of primordial forces signalling the end of Romanticism. I also discussed the drug problem, arguing that the use of drugs embodies an extreme example of the attempt to bestow a surrogate meaning on individual life in the context of the existential crisis of modern man.

In a section of *Ride the Tiger* entitled 'Social Dissolution', I emphasised once more my work's detachment from any practical aim. I here argued that there is nothing in the political and social sphere to which it is worth deeply committing oneself today. *Apoliteia*[24] must be the norm for the differentiated man. Nor, for such a man, is the antithesis between 'East' and 'West' of any importance: for 'East' and 'West' are merely different aspects of the same problem (as I had already mentioned almost thirty years earlier in the pages of *Revolt*). A choice between the two can only be taken on crudely practical bases, as the Communist East threatens those who do not wish to submit to its rule, even resorting to physical elimination. In this section of *Ride the Tiger*, when discussing the crisis of patriotic and family ideals (among others), I emphasised what I had already noted in the introduction to the book: that such ideals are essentially aspects of the bourgeois world – mythical, sentimental, rhetorical or romantic extensions of this world destined to undergo increasing dissolution. In particular, in order to provide a further example of the ambiguity that marks the present age, I examined the issue of sex. No doubt, I argued, the collapse or impending collapse of all taboos, authorities and formalities with regard to sex might be regarded as a positive occurrence; the question arises, however, as to just *who* will exploit this freedom and in what way – whether, in other words, such freedom will engender something other than simple petty corruption, sexual primitivism and a pandemic of erotic obsession. The points I raised here with regard to the prospect of free, intense and essential intercourse between man and woman share much in common with some of the things I wrote in *The Metaphysics of Sex*. Once more, in these pages of *Ride the Tiger*, I emphasised the absurdity of ordinary procreation from a superior perspective: I identified the safest path to ensure a form of continuity, not with procreation by blood, but with the transmission of wisdom and of an inner orientation to those sufficiently qualified (i.e., the idea of spiritual fatherhood). Given the nature of modern dissolution, mere blood links no longer provide an adequate support, for each new generation feels increasingly and anarchically removed from the one that came before it.

The final chapter of *Ride the Tiger* is entitled 'The Spiritual Problem'. In this chapter, I developed some of the ideas I had first discussed in the course of my critique of contemporary neo-spiritualism: I pointed out that the present is witnessing the spread of 'spiritualist' tendencies, which – generally speaking – reflect not a positive change of direction, but rather the decomposition of an age of twilight, and, in a way, embody the counterpart to the materialism of such an age. I sought to be as clear as possible regarding these matters, at the cost of potentially disillusioning those readers who had followed my work on esotericism, yoga and initiation so far. All 'neo-spiritualist' cases aside – neo-spiritualism usually serving merely as a poor surrogate for religion – when turning to consider genuine traditional sciences, one must always bear in mind that the present conditions of humanity, marked as they are by the rapid retreat and concealment of all true centres capable of exerting a transcendent influence upon man, makes the effective realisation of any 'initiatory disclosure of consciousness' impossible, or only possible in exceptional circumstances. This is also true for the human type I sought to address in *Ride the Tiger* – although this type of person certainly appears more inclined to self-realisation than others, and cannot fail to regard self-realisation as the centre and ultimate purpose of his own existence. What generally remains an available option for similar individuals today is, on the one hand, to foster an inner drive towards transcendence – a drive unmitigated by any external circumstance (in the same way as 'the hinge of a slammed door remains still', or the needle of a compass turns to point north after each oscillation); on the other, to allow such a drive to produce whatever results it may in everyday life, while awaiting the day in which all obstacles will have been removed – either in this life, or in one of the many other states of being – and the accumulated drive will prove unstoppable. One of the effects produced by the inner drive towards transcendence that I just mentioned is the change in one's attitude toward death: a positive *contemplatio mortis*[25] that allows the individual to remain unaffected by the prospect of dying; in such a way, the individual, so to speak, puts death *behind* himself. Yet, this new approach to death does not paralyse the individual: on the contrary, it engenders a superior, elated and free mode of living that is accompanied by a magic, lucid inebriation.

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[24] Greek: 'apolitical', which Evola understood as a complete disinterest and non-participation in contemporary politics.

It is in this context that I also came to discuss the individual right over one's own life, which is to say: the issue of suicide. I outlined the various reasons why certain doctrines – such as the Buddhist, Stoic and Jain[26] – have defended the right to take one's own life, while pointing to the inconsistency of those arguments derived from religious theism which deny such a right. Although I pointed out that suicide remains a legitimately available option for those who have achieved inner freedom – a small minority of the population – I nevertheless warned against choosing this option on the basis of the traditional doctrine according to which individual life on Earth is not a fortuitous or irrational phenomenon, nor the unasked-for gift from a Creator, but rather the consequence of a transcendental choice that each individual has made before birth – a consequence the meaning of which varies from individual to individual. An outline of this truth should prove sufficient to render all events that appear tragic and obscure less dramatic: for – as the Eastern saying goes – 'life on Earth is but a journey in the hours of the night': as such, life is merely one episode set in a far broader framework that extends before and beyond it. In the case of those who possess a higher level of consciousness – or of memory (almost in the Platonic sense)[27] – this teaching should also provide a further context in which to read the various approaches I have outlined in the book. For it should be clear that if an individual is ever to legitimately run dangers and take risks, he ought not do so out of *amor fati*,[28] but on the basis of an almost oracular process: the knowledge of himself and of what he has chosen for himself. A specific application of the aforementioned theory regards the ultimate existential problem faced by the human type I addressed in *Ride the Tiger*. In the final chapter of the book, I explained that: 'The rising above what can be understood by mere human reason, and the attainment of a different inner level, and of a kind of invincibility otherwise difficult to gain, becomes possible, by means of adequate reactions, perhaps specifically in those cases where nothing seems to emerge from the landscape crossed during the individual journey in the hours of the night: those cases where the idea of *Geworfenheit*[29]

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[25] Latin: 'contemplation of death'.

[26] Jainism is one of the oldest religions that is still practiced in India, dating back to at least a thousand years BC. It teaches that all individuals are potentially divine, and that all those who successfully escape the life-and-death cycle of *karma* achieve 'god-consciousness',

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and become gods themselves.

[27] In Plato's *Phaedrus*, it is said that souls have perfect knowledge in their pure state, in the Imaginal realm, but once they are born in bodies, they forget everything, and must re-learn it all from the shadows of the Ideal realm that comprise our world. Therefore, memory is not a matter of learning new knowledge, but rather of restoring that which has been forgotten in a more perfect state.

[28] Latin: 'love of fate'.

[29] This was a term first used by Heidegger to describe one's state of being-in-the-world.

of forcefully having "been thrown" into the world and time, as well as in a place where physical existence itself is increasingly uncertain – seems to find confirmation.' In the conclusion to the book – and not merely as an act of faith – I thus made the following suggestion: that 'it is the realisation of the aforementioned potentialities – potentialities that would appear less evident, and prove more difficult to realise in circumstances more desirable, from a merely human perspective – that is the ultimate motive behind a transcendental choice of this kind: for the "being" in question, by choosing to live in a world of an opposite sort from that which is consonant to its nature – the world of Tradition – has chosen to put itself to a difficult test.' Besides, I had already favoured a similar interpretation in the conclusion to *Revolt Against the Modern World*, where I had referred to certain ancient doctrines on the matter.

The realistic point of view I felt the need to adopt in *Ride the Tiger* has lately led to my polemical confrontation with certain people who still cherish false hopes with regard to the current potential of 'traditional residues'. For instance, I discussed certain matters with Titus Burckhardt,[30] who pointed to remnants of Tradition in areas outside Europe. I felt compelled to ask Burckhardt whether he was willing to acknowledge the fact that these areas, too, will fall subject to 'cyclical laws' – in which case, any emphasis on places where devolution has *yet* to reach the level it has reached in the West seems rather irrelevant. Burckhardt also mentioned the existence of 'spiritual influences that, albeit often invisible, by far surpass all of the material powers of humanity', and which are exercised by surviving 'initiatory' centres. While stressing the fact that I do not deny the possibility that similar influences might exist, I remarked that it is likely that those centres capable of exerting them might have received the order not to do so, in such a way as to not interfere with the general process of devolution. Otherwise, what should we make of a place like Tibet, which is being invaded and profaned by the Chinese Communists? Or of the Japanese *kamikaze*,[31] who in most cases were decimated like flies by the massive firepower of terrified anti-aircraft crews, and were never allowed to draw near to the enemy so as to activate 'the wind of the gods'?[32] And while some Sufi initiatory centres certainly exist within Islam, their presence hardly prevents the Arab world from 'evolving' at an increasing speed in a modernist, progressive and anti-traditional direction. To these, many other examples might be added. (I returned to such matters in a chapter of the second edition of my book, *The Bow and the Club*, entitled 'Initiatory Centres and History'.)

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[30] Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984) was a Swiss German traditionalist author who was a life-long friend of Frithjof Schuon. He became a Muslim in pursuit of Tradition, and that remained his area of specialty, but he wrote books on other traditional subjects as well, particularly in the field of sacred art. Evola is probably referring to Burckhardt's highly complimentary review of *Ride the Tiger*, in which he agrees with most of Evola's conclusions but disagrees with Evola's view that pockets of traditional institutions no longer exist in the modern world. This review is reproduced in an anthology of Burckhardt's writings, *Mirror of the Intellect* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), as well as in *The Essential Titus Burckhardt* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2003).

The world, therefore, appears to be left to its own resources. In other words, the general process of 'solidification' and deconsecration of the world limits the influence of the aforementioned powers – powers which are also difficult to measure without taking account of the sphere of action, as well as that of pure knowledge. Once again, the impression one gains is that the cycle is drawing to a close.

In many ways, *Ride the Tiger* reflects the path that I have chosen for myself: for the indications and guidelines suggested in the book are those which I have sought to apply in the course of my own life. This, however, does not bestow a merely subjective and private character on *Ride the Tiger*, as if it were a kind of spiritual testament; on the contrary, I believe that the problems and experiences that have marked my own life reflect and contribute to define typical features of individual existence in the contemporary world.

Ride the Tiger might be regarded as the completion of a cycle: for in a way, in writing this book, I returned to the approach I had adopted early on in my career, an approach to which I was drawn as a youth by a deep-seated – if not always conscious – impulse that had first led me to radically reject the existing world and its values, and to embrace the point zero of Dadaism (as I had understood and experienced it at the time). I already mentioned the fact that this drive – which had also been the drive towards an ill-defined liberation – had once led me to the verge of catastrophe. In the years that followed my existential crisis as a youth, I had regained control, consolidated my ideas and gradually come to possess firm points of reference in terms both of worldview and of conduct. After I had made an attempt with my writing to disclose the sources that might impart such firmness (chiefly by means of those works I composed in the second phase of my career, after the speculative, philosophical period); after I had sought to translate the ideal of a revolt against the modern world on an active, even political level – thus obeying the second drive that marks my character (my *kshatriya* inclination); at a time when the turn of events had made it clear to me that any such initiative on the political plane is futile, I came to face the same problem I had first faced at the time of my personal crisis in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Yet on this occasion, my fundamental inclinations still being the same, I possessed what it took to face a similar problem in a more positive way, which is to say: all that I had gained from my many experiences in different fields. No essential aspect of my life, therefore, has either been lost or revoked; and this is not so much the case with the various experiences I made, or the theories and points of references I adopted, as it is with that which can be gained by such experiences, theories and points of reference, in terms of inner development, by those who have understood them. Hence, with my most recent book, I have sought to continue keeping in touch with those who have followed my work so far; the present pages, instead, I envisage as guidelines which might prevent possible misunderstandings, and offer the reader an overview of the essential character and different phases of my career. If not today, then perhaps one day, the symbolic – rather than merely personal – value of this work will be acknowledged.

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[31] For a discussion of the *kamikaze* by Evola, see his essay, 'Varieties of Heroism' in *Metaphysics of War*.

[32] This is a literal translation of *kamikaze* from the Japanese. The term is a reference to two typhoons which destroyed the fleets of Kublai Khan in 1274 and 1281, which saved Japan from invasion by the Mongols.

In recent years – the world of official politics notwithstanding (a possible exception here being the 'Movimento Sociale Italiano' Party) – we have witnessed the adoption of the ideals of the Right in certain milieus. With my more recent writing – most notably, with *Men Among the Ruins* and my critical essay on Fascism, but also by the publication of a number of articles – I have sought to provide such milieus with adequate points of reference, so that they might follow certain ideals on the basis of a common doctrinal framework. The collapse and deviation of these milieus is a concrete threat. Many individuals and groups embracing a vague traditionalism have existed in the past, and many have chosen to find support in Catholicism. Yet, in such a way, the Right is running the risk of turning into something rather uninteresting. A similar process can be envisaged with regard to the idea of Tradition. Tradition, as understood in the unique and superior sense I have previously defined (whereby it is not for mere sake of emphasis that the word is spelled with a capital 'T'), is increasingly becoming an object of interest. Precisely on account of this renewed interest, some people have sought to favour a watered-down idea of Tradition marked by moralising and religious concerns – an idea that, on account of its proving certainly less inconvenient and demanding, can more easily take hold among the public, with a consequent lowering of standards. In this respect, the words used by a rather well-known Italian writer are revealing. To the question of whether he or those of his generation had in some way been influenced by my 'traditionalist' ideas, and the prospect of their translation onto a political level, this writer answered affirmatively, not without adding, however, that he had distanced himself from such views when they had served their purpose – a purpose he compared to that of a healthy sunbath when he suggested that: 'Unless one stops at a given moment, one gets burnt.'[33] This is no doubt an elegant and clever way of admitting both to one's incapability of following an unconditioned approach, and the need for adopting a more watered-down version of traditionalism.

I discussed and further developed such matters in one of the last chapters of the second edition of my book *The Bow and the Club*, which I will soon turn to consider. I had been offered the chance for a similar discussion by the publication, at the hands of a rather well-known Italian journalist, of a collection of essays pretentiously entitled *What Tradition Means* (*Che cosa è la Tradizione*).[34] The few pages of this collected volume to actually engage with the subject of its title provided a rather confused and flimsy portrayal of Tradition.

The book of mine I just mentioned, *The Bow and the Club*, is the latest work of mine to have been published (for Scheiwiller). This volume is a collection of articles, some of which I had first published elsewhere or delivered in the form of conference papers, while others are new. The title of the book is meant to describe the two chief fields taken into consideration. So the 'bow' aims at a remote field: issues of a transcendent nature; the 'club', which strikes down closer objects, instead symbolises my analysis and critique of various aspects of contemporary society.

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[33] I am uncertain of this reference, although Evola may be referring to Giorgio Almirante (1914-1988), a writer and leader of the MSI who did, indeed, break with Evola's ideas after initially supporting them. When he resumed leadership of the MSI after an absence in 1969, he set about attempting to bring the MSI into line with mainstream politics.

[34] *Che cosa è la Tradizione* (Milan: Bompiani, 1971) was written by the Italian author Élémire Zolla (1926-2002), who wrote a number of books on religious and traditional topics. Beginning in 1969 he published the religious journal, *Conoscenze religiosa*. This particular book is untranslated, although several of his others are available in English.

One of the essays of the former kind seeks to provide a systematic examination of the superior, and more genuine, features of initiation. I felt the need to address this subject for two reasons: firstly, because of the regrettable fact that, when initiation is not discussed in connection to what insignificant traces remain of Freemasonry, it is generally mentioned in the context of Theosophical and 'neo-spiritualist' sects, in such a way as to give rise to much confusion and misunderstanding. Secondly, I was motivated to provide a detailed definition of initiation by the fact that certain modern disciplines – most notably, the comparative study of religion and ethnology – appear to be lacking adequate points of reference on the basis of which to examine the wealth of evidence that is now available. Hence, such disciplines have often confused the figure of the initiate with that of the mystic, of the yogi, or even of the primitive shaman – although generally, rather sharp differences exist between these various figures. My essay on initiation, therefore, serves to provide an exact definition of the subject. In another essay of a similar kind, instead, I examined myth in an attempt to refute its irrationalist or even psychoanalytical interpretations (e.g., the theory of 'archetypes') – interpretations that overshadow the more profound and metaphysical meaning of myth. A further essay is devoted to the difficult question of what 'symbols' can really be seen to distinguish 'East' from 'West'. I here criticised the tendentious views of certain Catholic authors – among them, Guardino[35] and Cuttat[36] –

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[35] Actually Guardini. Romano Guardini (1885-1968) was a Catholic priest and writer who was born in Italy, but who lived most of his life in Germany. He attacked modernity from a Catholic perspective, and was very influential. He was officially ostracized in the Third Reich because he criticised the Nazis for their denial of Jesus' Jewish origins. Many of his books are available in English.

[36] Jacques-Albert Cuttat (1909-?) was a Swiss Frenchman who was a diplomat by profession, and he was also a friend of Frithjof Schuon. He participated in the latter's Alawiyya Order as a Muslim until he broke with Schuon in 1950, and he returned to Catholicism the following year. He still advocated a traditionalist perspective even after this, however. His book, *The Encounter of Religions: A Dialogue Between the West and the Orient* (New York: Desclee, 1957) is available in English.

who had followed the approach adopted by H. Massis[37] in his (rather discredited) book *The Defence of the Occident (La défense de l'Occident).*[38] One chapter of *The Bow and the Club* is instead based on a paper I once delivered in Germany: it examines the relation between German and Roman culture, and touches upon such issues as the 'Hyperborean mystery' and the idea of 'Northern Light'.[39]

The 'bow', as I mentioned, symbolises those essays of the book that discuss various aspects of the modern world, and which, as such, might prove of a more general interest to the public. One of these essays is entitled 'Freedom of Sex and Freedom from Sex' ('Libertà del sesso e libertà dal sesso'): it examines the so-called 'sexual revolution', and provides a critical overview of its chief proponents – and, most notably, Wilhelm Reich.[40] In particular, I here emphasised the rather curious fact that the supposed contemporary struggle for a new kind of sexuality freed from all bonds and inhibitions has, in fact, fostered a primitive approach to sex that appears to ignore its more profound and interesting dimensions. This, of course, was only to be expected, given the 'democratic' nature of this 'sexual revolution', which is inevitably destined to turn sex into a mere consumer product available to anyone. All attempts at such a 'revolution', of course, willingly ignore under what conditions freedom *of* sex might be the means to achieve freedom *from* sex (i.e., an inner freedom with respect to sexual matters). Wilhelm Reich has shown awareness of the primordial and super-personal dimension of sex, yet has proven incapable of any metaphysical understanding in this regard. In a way, when discussing the theory of 'integral orgasm' as a path to this superior sexual dimension, Reich is playing with fire, for he knows nothing of its counterpart: the *other* element and power – what Tantrism has described as *Shiva* (the dominating counterpart of *Shakti*).

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[37] Henri Massis (1886-1970) was a French Catholic writer who was active in the Right in France for many years, including in the Action Française, in Vichy France, and in defence of French rule in Algeria.

[38] Available in English as *Defence of the West* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1927).

[39] Evola also discusses these matters in *Revolt Against the Modern World.*

[40] Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) was an Austrian psychologist of Jewish descent who fled to the United States. He believed that sexual repression was at the root of all the ills of the modern world, including Fascism. He is known for his theory of orgone energy, which he believed was the creative force in nature, and which was manifested during sex. He had a great influence on the beat generation.

One last essay of *The Bow and the Club* that I would like to mention is 'Youth, Beats and Anarchists of the Right' ('La gioventú, i *beats* e gli anarchici di destra').[41] I had already discussed the matters this essay examines on various other occasions. As it were, many of those young people who had made a positive impression on me upon my return to Italy in 1948, on account of the fact that they subscribed to the ideals of the Right, had gradually lost their way. Of these young men, those good at writing had chosen to cash in their literary talent by turning to fields such as journalism; and even when their inner inclinations had remained the same, they nevertheless had given in, in other respects (I will here refer to what I have previously written concerning the watering-down of traditionalism). The only group that has remained faithful to its original ideas and has made no compromises is the one known as 'Ordine Nuovo'.[42] However, it should also be noted that even those young men who have continued to follow certain values share little in common with the anti-bourgeois youth of my day, the ideal – if distorted – legacy of which lies in the anarchistic, 'protesting' and 'burnt-out youth' embodied by beats and hippies. The 'revolutionary' drive of the former youths of today, on the other hand, is generally limited to the ideological and political sphere, where it is expressed through the fight against the democratic system and Marxism. Quite a few of these young men are also willing to resort to action and run concrete risks; and yet their everyday life is hardly 'revolutionary': rather, it remains as bourgeois as that of most other people – particularly with respect to marriage, sex, offspring and family.

It is for this reason that, in the aforementioned essay, I chose to discuss the beat movement (in its original form, however, not in its more recent and squalid offshoots). I emphasised the problems and limits of this movement, and also pointed to the various ways in which those youths who are driven by similar urges as those of the beats might avoid dangerous paths or deadly snares, while securing for themselves a legitimate framework in which to voice dissent, and acquiring a real centre that might allow them to 'be.' Hence, my idea of an 'anarchist of the Right': who, unlike other anarchists, rejects certain things not for the mere sake of rejection, but because he cherishes values that are not found in the present order; because he rejects the bourgeois world, and aspires to a superior freedom conjoined with a more rigorous discipline (for 'one can only allow himself that which he also has the power to refuse': 'If the hinge is strong, the door can be slammed').

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[41] Available in English at *Evola As He Is* (thompkins_cariou.tripod.com/id99.html).

[42] The Ordine Nuovo, or 'New Order', originally began as a sub-group within the MSI, but it split off and became a separate organisation in 1956 when its members became disgruntled with the moderate drift of the MSI, wanting to establish a group that would remain close to Evola's principles. The group engaged in a variety of intellectual, spiritual and political activities directed toward this aim. Some of its members were accused of engaging in anti-Leftist terrorism during the 1960s and '70s, which led to it being dissolved by court order in 1974.

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As the time has now come for me to draw some conclusions, I believe I can safely claim to have done 'what needed to be done'. No doubt, this claim is subjective insofar as it reflects my personal awareness – an awareness I have often experienced, and which I have frequently referred to in the present book – of having fulfilled those duties I had come to accept as such; duties, that is, which only marginally correspond to the more congenial duties I might have had in a different context (a different civilisation), where my role could hardly have been that of the 'writer'. In fact, I never identified myself with such a role, which I have always regarded as the mere means to an end. Nor, in this context, have prospects of 'success' or 'failure' ever been of any importance to me on a personal level; if anything, my chief concern is (and has always been) of an objective sort: for a better organisation of my work in the various phases of my career, if made possible, would have allowed for a greater efficiency in pursuing my aims.

It is not only on an external level that the predictions made on the basis of a traditionalist approach to Western history find new, rigorous confirmations with each passing day. Were the perspective deriving from a traditionalist approach to history not to ensure a Spinozist[43] form of impassivity for those who adopt it, one could not avoid experiencing a feeling of outrage when faced with the spectacle of a West busy digging its own grave with bovine idiocy. In fact, were one to ignore the rigorous way in which certain actions are immediately followed by reactions, he would be reminded of the ancient saying according to which the gods blind those whom they wish to ruin.[44] As for the specific scenario of contemporary Italy, it is both pitiful and disgusting.

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[43] Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch Jewish philosopher who is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of all time. In the sense in which Evola is using the term, he is referring to Spinoza's determinism, by which he believed that both history and individual lives are absolutely predetermined, independent of human will, and that the only true freedom available to us is the freedom to understand why things happen the way they do, since we are powerless to change them.

[44] This is actually a modern distortion of the original Greek saying, which, being quoted frequently, has gone through many transformations through the centuries. The oldest known usage comes from Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which it reads as: 'Evil sometimes seems good to a man whose mind a god leads to destruction', although ancient Greek sources say that even this usage is a retelling of a still older, unidentified source, which is said to read as: 'When a god plans harm against a man, he first damages the mind of the man he is plotting against.'

Not only the political and social sphere, but even that of culture today leaves little room for new endeavours. Naturally, it is not official culture that I am concerned with here: for, at best, this consists in nothing more than what I have previously termed 'dumb intelligence'; more commonly still, as in the case of the cliques behind mainstream publishing houses and newspapers, official culture is simply the expression of a more or less politicised intelligentsia – politicised, that is, in the dominant democratic and Leftist sense of the term. All in all, my books have probably raised more interest abroad (I have already mentioned what works of mine have been translated, particularly into French). I am sure that in Italy, I must have a faithful and attentive, if select, readership: for, with the exception of my very latest works, all the first editions of my books are sold out, and in some cases second or third editions have already been published. Mine, however, is a mysterious readership. Aside from the case of those people from the younger generations who have mostly been attracted to my work by the political framework traditionalist ideas provide, I know of almost no qualified individual who, on the basis of those ideas I upheld and divulged over the years, has proven capable enough to produce serious, methodical and well thought-out studies, and to give birth to a new current or school – as has partly been the case in France with the work of René Guénon ('Guénonian scholasticism' – the fear of abandoning the Master's ideas – notwithstanding).[45] I already mentioned the significant gap that separates my own views from the foolish ambitions of certain Right wing milieus – milieus that have effectively ostracised me. As for Germany, the country that in many ways provided a more fertile soil for my work than Italy in the past, nothing much can be expected from it today: for the military collapse of the country has been followed by an inner, intellectual and spiritual breakdown, accompanied by an almost neurotic reaction against all superior interests and ideas. Despite the few exceptions to this scenario, it seems that 'the desert grows'.[46]

I was informed of the existence of a few small groups in Italy inspired by the ideas I have sought to promote – groups which are operating outside the editorial and political sphere. A 'Centre for Evolian Studies' was founded in Genoa,[47] and a similar step was taken in France – although so far, this field has produced nothing significant enough to be regarded as a firm new start. However, I should point out that I only keep the most essential contacts, and that my direct means of information are very limited. Besides, I have also witnessed rather curious instances in which regressive processes have affected individuals whom one would normally regard as being immune to inner collapse on account of the superior wisdom to which they have been exposed.

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[45] Evola further discusses his view of Guénonian scholasticism in his *René Guénon: A Teacher for Modern Times.*

[46] The full passage is: 'The desert grows. Woe to him whose desert is within!' This is from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* chapter 76, section two.

At any rate, I believe that I have provided those people with the desire and capability to examine and further develop certain subjects with the essential guidelines in various fields. I feel no need to specialise in any one of these fields in particular, although one day I well might, if I have nothing better to do (provided, that is, I don't quit altogether). It thus occurred to me that I might write the present pages for the purposes I previously mentioned: firstly, to provide a kind of guide to my writings; and secondly, to outline just what aspects of my work might be regarded as something more than an irrelevant contingency, in the eventuality that my work as a whole might one day be examined.

Rome, January 1972

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[47] This would be the Centro Studi Evoliani, which was established by Renato Del Ponte in 1969, and which had affiliated chapters all over the world. It no longer exists, but it has been succeeded by a number of organisations, particularly the Fondazione Julius Evola (Julius Evola Foundation) in Rome.

HERITAGE